

UCLA FRENCH STUDIES



Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de rechercher si, par hasard, se trouverait ici l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.

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Poetry and Music: A Roundtable Discussion with Pierre Boulez

Recorded by Paul Merrill. Transcribed by David Eadington, Laura Leavitt, Leakthina Ollier, Amy Pitsker and Alicia Tolbert.

In the fall of 1992, the French Department of UCLA was privileged to host a roundtable discussion on the complex relationship between poetry and music as experienced through the work of Pierre Boulez. What follows are excerpts from the discussion, featuring the words of three of the participants: Pierre Boulez, Mary Ann Caws and Nancy Perloff. Andrea Loselle, Assistant Professor of French at UCLA, moderated the roundtable and introduced the participants.

Introduction by Andrea Loselle

Pierre Boulez is generally acknowledged as one of the most important figures in music since the Second World War. He is active not only as a composer but also as a conductor and as founder, director and now honorary director of the famous Paris-based music research institute IRCAM (*Institut de Recherches et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique*). In addition to his instrumental works, Mr. Boulez composed, earlier in his career, several major vocal works with poems by René Char, Stéphane Mallarmé, e. e. cummings and Henri Michaux. Composed mainly in the late 1940s, 50s and early 60s, these works' titles are: *Le visage nuptial*, *Soleil des eaux*, *Le marteau sans maître*, *Poésie pour pouvoir*, *Pli selon pli*, and finally *Cummings ist der Dichter*. Of these works *Visage nuptial*, *Soleil des eaux*, *Le marteau sans maître* and *Pli selon pli* have undergone numerous revisions. They represent instead works in progress and, in a couple of cases, a long span of years spent reworking, reinterrogating music, its organization, structure... and music's relationship to poetry (notably *Soleil des eaux*, which was revised four times between 1948 and 1965). As was the case with some of the instrumental pieces, *Poésie pour pouvoir* (1958) for five-track tape and orchestra with a poem by Michaux was withdrawn and abandoned by the composer. *Cummings ist der Dichter* (1970) for chamber chorus and orchestra is one of the rare cases of a piece that Mr. Boulez has neither revised nor withdrawn.¹ If revisions serve as any guideline, those works composed with poems by Char and Mallarmé

appear to have involved more "work," a fact which may be accounted for by the consideration that the poems by these two poets in particular are known to be "difficult" and hermetic.

Given the importance of his vocal works, it is not surprising that Mr. Boulez has also written a number of essays on poetry and music. To name those most pertinent to the subject of today's roundtable: "Constructing an Improvisation, *Deuxième Improvisation sur Mallarmé*" (1961), "Sound, Word, Synthesis" (1958), "Son et verbe" (1958), and "Poetry—Centre and Absence—Music" (1963). To this list may be included "Sonate, que me veux-tu?" (1960), an essay on the *Third Piano Sonata*. The *Third Piano Sonata* is an instrumental piece, which does not include a literary text or reference but which is based on poetic and literary concepts from the work of Mallarmé and Joyce. These essays testify not only to Mr. Boulez's fascination with the interpretive complications involved in setting a poem to music but also to the influence literature has on his work.

The conventional expression, "to set a poem to music," pejoratively implies that music is but the ornamental frame around a center, say a portrait. But in light of Mr. Boulez's music and writings, this expression jars. It goes without saying that we are not talking about composing just songs, just as, for example, the subtitle of *Pli selon pli, Portrait de Mallarmé* is not literal but double, reflecting critically as it must on the composer's use of the poem in a musical context. It is thus to certain writers and poets that Mr. Boulez says he owes a degree of his musical thinking and development, stating that "some writers at the present time have gone much further than composers in the organization, the actual mental structure, of their works" ("Sonate, que me veux-tu?" *Orientations* 143).

If, as Mr. Boulez has written, "[m]usic is an art that has no 'meaning': hence the primary importance of structures that are properly speaking linguistic, given the impossibility of the musical vocabulary assuming a simply communicative function" ("Aesthetics and Fetishists," *Orientations* 32), we, in the literary field, may be confused by the communicative function of expressions such as "musical vocabulary," "musical grammar," and "musical language" in our effort to discuss poetry and music together. If poetry is both meaning and sound, sound in the analysis of a poem is often subordinated to meaning, or, as Mallarmé writes in "La Musique et

les lettres": "vain, si le langage, par la retrempe et l'essor purifiants du chant, n'y confère un sens" (648 [in vain, if language, by the song's purifying retempering and flight, does not confer a meaning], my translation). In music this situation is perhaps reversed because: 1) we do not read a poem but listen to it in a musical context, and 2) spoken or recited poetry differs fundamentally from sung poetry. Here we come upon a disjunction: it isn't always possible to read and listen at the same time, particularly when the music and the poetry are those of Pierre Boulez, René Char and Stéphane Mallarmé. Poetry and music can be seen to form two opposing sides. But with, I believe, this difference: whereas a poem can serve mediums other than its own as a meaningful text, a musical piece cannot do so without being irreversibly turned into a reading, that is, without being silenced.

Poetry and music are nevertheless historically linked mediums, poetry itself having originally been, not recited, but sung, and from whose linguistic exigencies music broke off to become an autonomous medium. Today, they may appear to many to have only a rhetorical relationship if only because their conjunction may be complicated by the tendency to convert the historical conjunction into a purely natural one, a tendency which we can trace back, at least in the literary domain, to certain romanticist notions. In 1957, Pierre Boulez reflected on the use of this word, "conjunction," in another context: "La flexibilité de ce mot: 'conjonction' permettra, en outre, de cultiver quelques fleurs de rhétorique ou de nouer un joli bouquet d'épines" ("D'une conjonction—en trois éclats," *Relèves d'apprenti...* 275 [The flexibility of this word: 'conjunction' moreover will permit the cultivation of some rhetorical flowers or the knotting of a lovely bouquet of thorns], my translation). Today we will, perhaps, knot an attractive bouquet of thorns instead of cultivate "naturally" more rhetorical flowers.

I should now like to introduce our other roundtable participants. Mary Ann Caws is Distinguished Professor of French, Comparative Literature and English at the Graduate Center, of the City University of New York. She is author of a great many books on poetry and art, particularly of the twentieth century and around the Dada and surrealist movements. She has published widely both here and in France on such writers as André Breton, Edmond Jabès, Blaise Cendrars, Tristan Tzara, Pierre Reverdy, Antonin Artaud, and Yves Bonnefoy. She edited and translated selected poetry and

prose of Mallarmé with New Directions in 1982. She is also a leading specialist of René Char, having written three books on his work and translated a book of his poems; her last critical work on Char is entitled *L'œuvre filante de René Char*, published by Nizet in 1981, and New Directions has just published *Selected Poems of René Char*, which Professor Caws edited. Professor Caws' interests are not limited to poetry alone; she has published books on the subject of perception, and the relationship of visual art to literature. Professor Caws brings to this roundtable her expertise in poetry and an interdisciplinary approach.

Nancy Perloff is a specialist of French music of the first half of the 20th century, as well as of ethnomusicology and 18th and 19th century music. She earned her Ph.D. in musicology from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and is currently Research Associate in the Department of Photography at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Her book, *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie*, appeared just last year with the Oxford University Press. She has also published an article in *The Musical Quarterly* entitled "Klee and Webern: Speculations on Modernist Theories of Composition." Dr. Perloff is currently conducting cross-disciplinary research on music and the visual arts. I would like to thank Dr. Perloff for accepting on short notice to appear here in place of Professor Marjorie Perloff, who was unable to come due to a scheduling conflict.

Mr. Boulez has agreed to begin this roundtable discussion with his own reflections and comments on music and poetry. Afterwards we will then move on to comments and questions from Professor Caws and Dr. Perloff.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive list of publications, performances and revisions, see Peter F. Stacey, *Boulez and the Modern Concept* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P) 144-48.

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Pierre Boulez

I have no statement to make per se, I just want to explain what the relationship of poetry and music has been in my life.

I suppose that you heard all these titles of works which I have done on the poems of René Char, Michaud, Mallarmé, of course, and of cummings. All these works were composed practically 30 years ago; the most recent date to the early sixties, and after that I composed almost exclusively instrumental music. You might wonder why all these works were composed in the early stage of my life. I suppose it's because when you discover literature, as well as music, and it's not the first time it happens, you rely on the forces of other people. Poets are a very strong force and I was always attracted to poetry—although I never wrote poems myself, I should say that immediately. I am not gifted for that and I never will be, I suppose.

I was attracted to poetry because I think that especially French poets at the end of the 19th century were far ahead of musicians and poets from other countries. The evolution of the French poetry in the mid-19th century from Baudelaire, but particularly from Rimbaud and Mallarmé, is a really amazing history. I think that poetry has never, neither in expression nor in structure, gone so far. So far, that after that even the surrealist movement, while it could find other paths, could never go further than Mallarmé in restructuring the French language. Therefore Mallarmé remains a kind of a satiric poet because the form of his poems, the structure of his poems, is not easy to crack; it's very condensed and the syntax of the French language is completely reformed. Reformed in the literal sense of re-formed: formed again. I think that was what interested me at the outset; these poets' radical view of the French language which brought to me a radical view of musical language.

My experience was not an isolated example: musicians in need of some inspiration often go to poetry. Of course they go to poetry for poetic inspiration—we have always had a lot of vocal literature, and the 19th century developed the form of vocal settings of poems

known as *lieds*. Certainly, during the Romantic Movement especially, for some Romantic composers, it was a kind of expression of a moment which had never existed to such an extent before the 19th century. Further on, the *lied* became a sort of salon music: less and less necessary, less and less expressive, and less and less meaningful—at least I find it that way. Progressively the voice was asking for a different setting and the kind of *lied* for voice and piano gradually disappeared altogether from the literature at the beginning of this century. More and more the vocal music was mixed with, for example, the chamber group of instruments, as in the Viennese school of Schoenberg especially, just as Webern did, and Berg afterwards with the *Sieben frühe Lieder*, the *Altenberglieder* or *Der Wein*. These were certainly always *lieds* but with an amplified texture that at a certain point—and the case is very specific with Webern—the musicians were lost in search of a musical language and especially of a musical form. Every aspect of the spoken language was so renovated, so radically renovated, that they practically needed a guideline, and the poem gave this guideline, gave this inspiration. Thus the musical form was totally influenced by the poetic form. You can see that in the case of Mahler, particularly in the first half of his life, even as the ideas that were treated symphonically later were first found in the setting of poems—that's especially the case with the 1st symphony and the 4th symphony as well. So you see that there was a mixture between the pure musical form; it goes back to Beethoven's 9th symphony, and you can find it in the 2nd string quartet of Schoenberg in f# minor as well. You always find a mixture of voice and instrument, but before the beginning of the 20th century this mixture was never so necessary; it changed the relationship of music and poetry.

This was also my position at the beginning, when I was composing, especially the first version of *Visage nuptial* in 1946. Between the first version in 1946 and the last version which was 1990/91, a lot of water has gone under the bridge. Certainly my view of the relationship of music and poetry has changed quite a lot. But it has changed also—I had no specific attitude before; I have not said I will mix music and poetry in this way or this way or this way—it depends very much on the poet you take. With Char, for instance, I began with "Visage nuptial" which is perhaps the longest poem ever written by Char, the "Visage nuptial" itself. *Visage nuptial* is a collection of five poems: two short, one long in the middle, then two

short poems. Then there is a kind of narration, a very abstract narration, but a narration, which is simply a love which begins, has a climax in the third piece, then dies and is regretted. So the narrative in itself is very simple. And I think when you have a narrative poem like that you have to follow the narration, you cannot escape it. Certainly in *Visage nuptial*, even in all the versions I did, which were more and more refined, richer and richer, I followed the narration, a kind of episodic thing: I mean an involvement with love, then a break of everything—the world doesn't exist anymore—and then prophecy of dying. The pieces shrink progressively and then the expression follows that at the end of this love—for the regret—you need a slow tempo. On the contrary, in the middle with the outburst of love you have to have a quick tempo, a very strong contrast.

So the music is dictated, practically, by the meaning of the poem. Then you have to follow a narration, to develop a narration. For me that was the interesting side in the beginning, which was the normal thing. It was like a theatrical work: in following the narration, you follow the drama of the poem. When, nine years later, I took *Marteau sans maître*, which is quite a different piece, at that point my intention was not at all the same. I was already thinking of a different kind of mixture because the poems I chose were extremely short each time: four lines, five lines, that's all. Therefore there is absolutely no narration you can follow. So you have to think of another way of doing it. I chose three poems in order to have a cycle. It was interesting to me that the poems don't appear in all pieces. You have the poems themselves, set into music, but you also have the resonance of these poems into the music. So you take the themes or the thematic of the poem and you develop it without the poem. I call that, after Henri Michaux's definition, center and absence of the poem in the music. You have certainly seen that in some museums or if you have visited Pompeii, for instance. You see some objects of the Roman time which have been burnt and you open the ashes or the volcanic stone and you see the exact mold—the shape of the object which has been burned. That's exactly what I think of the poem with music in this case; the music burns the poem, and then as you open the music, the poem remains as a shape—no longer as the poem, only as the shape of the poem. And that for me was the idea I had on this junction of poetry and music.

Therefore, in *Marteau sans maître* you have three different steps of involving the poem with the music—or maybe four steps, let's say. One, you speak the poem, and that's a piece which is written just for voice and flute. So you have two lines—twin lines—and the poem is said very obviously, and it is there in the foreground. The second step is when the poem is just the articulation of the music. You have development of the music, and then at some very important turning points the poem is there, to make you feel that the music is turning and going to another section. These are the interjections of the poem. And then the third step is when the poem is completely immersed in the music. There the vocal aspect approximates only one instrument, but with sonorities. And personally, as I've seen many works before and after me which use, for instance, a nonexistent language, I like a kind of abstract language created just for the sonority. But I am always embarrassed by that because even if I distort the poem, there remains the structure of language which is richer than any kind of invented language. Because the relationship is ambiguous, you have meaning and you have no meaning, and I will explain that later with what I did in my Mallarmé setting. But I began with this in *Marteau sans maître*—to have the text completely immersed, and it remains there, but it is like a secret buried into the music. Then there is the fourth step: the poem is said very rapidly, as it would be read, in the time of reading a poem. Thereafter, all the musical developments no longer have anything to do with the syllables of the poem, with the sonorities, but the voice is completely without any syllables. This suggests a vocal line which mixes with the instruments, where the word has disappeared completely from the music, but the spirit of the poem remains.

I did these four steps this way because the structure of the poems by Char was not a very strict kind of structure. It was on the contrary four lines, five lines—just very quick interjections; there was no traditional structure. When I came to Mallarmé it was quite a different story, because Mallarmé in French is precisely organized. First, he used the sonnet as a form, so you have two times four, two times three: the precise structure of a sonnet. And not only do you have the strophic organization, but also you have the rhymes, which are organized in a specific way. I don't want to go into that in detail, but the rhymes are organized two by two, and correspond between the four verses and the three verses. Then I

thought, "that's very nice to have a kind of poetic correspondence with Mallarmé," but what I think is more interesting is to develop the relationship with the structure of the poem. Then, if you go to the structure of the poem, you also have the meaning of the poem, because in the Mallarmé poetic, the structure and the meaning are so welded together that you have a unity of things that you cannot destroy. So to merely set the poem into music will not be enough and will not do justice to the poem itself.

Therefore I will give you an example of how this relationship can be related to style. For instance, in this poem you have the first group of four verses; to keep them in memory I used what is called a mathematic style, meaning a syllable can give birth to a flourish, a melodic flourish. So each syllable can have a very independent development. The meaning of the verse is very difficult to grasp because the music is, in a way, stronger than the words. So in this sense the music takes the words. And the accompaniment of the instrument was a kind of chords, just chords from time to time to sustain this melodic line, but it was a very flourishing melodic line, and you recognize the four verses because they are done precisely like that.

Then after that, the second group of four verses I say should have a complete contrast. I did the syllabic treatment. The syllabic treatment is when one note corresponds to one syllable, and, of course, the number of notes corresponds exactly to the number of syllables in the verse. Then you must take into consideration not only the verse itself but also the number of syllables. In this sonnet especially I am specific—in my second improvisation the number is eight. You have these eight syllables, very audible, and the figure eight will be always at the beginning of every musical thought; you will always have remembrance of this number eight, in the vocal line and in the corresponding music where everything is an echo of this structure of the verse. But also, you know, in the melismatic style I can have longer or shorter melismas and then the text will be understood very precisely or not understood very clearly. And I can do the same also with the syllabic division. Because if the syllables are close to each other, then I grasp everything. If I just stretch the syllables far from one another, further and further, I isolate one syllable and lose the sense—as much as the word was supporting the music at first then you have progressively a change and the music becomes more important than the words. So you

have always this kind of ambiguous relationship: I want to understand the text; I don't want to understand the text. In some parts the character is more important and in some other parts the meaning is more important. So you play when you are dealing with the relationship of poetry and music: you deal with this kind of relationship between understanding and not understanding. What you don't understand precisely, you compensate for by the feeling of the meaning. And that's what this kind of very interesting relationship is.

But let's finish with the structure of this sonnet. After that, for the two strophes of three, I could not reproduce four and four like I did. So then I go into the rhyme, and the verses which have the same rhyme will have the same musical translation. For instance, for a feminine rhyme there will be a melismatic line and for the masculine rhyme there will be, on the contrary, a syllabic organization. So then for the two groups of three you are going into the detail and just showing the structure of the rhymes. Of course you are not aware of all of that, but it's a kind of translation of the structure of the poem exactly in the music. After that, even if you don't know the structure of the poem—people who have never read the poem will understand the structure intuitively because I have given them the ways of grasping the music, and grasping the poem directly through the music. That was my relationship with the Mallarmé poems because it was very important for me to get to the point of the structure. And with cummings it was maybe more utopian, let's say, a kind of translation but not that literal, especially to find equivalence. You know in cummings' speech, the words have parenthesis and special punctuation. I tried to find, not of course a literal equivalent, but an equivalent. For instance, if you have parentheses, then a group of instruments will be specific. And when you finish these parentheses, the group of instruments disappears and you have another group of instruments or another vocal treatment, and so on and so forth. So it's much more flexible, much more supple, but at the same time, it's a translation where I use a kind of symbolic treatment of the writing. And this symbolic treatment gives me a form which has its roots in the poem but

which, of course, can also be grasped completely independently from the poem.

So that was the history of my development of the relationship between poetry and music as I conceived them at the time. I think now of composing some vocal music again, but cannot tell you about it because I will discover it when I compose it.

Mary Ann Caws

I'll follow up what Pierre Boulez has been saying by telling you a little bit about the way I conceive of poetry and translation, which I see as possessing an equal excitement of structure to that of music. I don't see a translation as a simple rendering or setting, far from it. I do see it as part of a reciprocal enlightenment. Let me say a word about René Char's poem "Visage nuptial" and then the Mallarmé texts Boulez uses. It seems to me that the correspondence the translator has to set up is again a changing one, multiple and shifting, rather than a static relationship A=B. Reading some of Pierre Boulez's writings about music, I am convinced that his shortcuts—you can get from A to C—also work against the static.

The kinds of complexities of understanding that are brought about by the musical renderings of people like Char and Mallarmé are intensely useful to us as translators and as critics. As I was telling Pierre Boulez before I started writing on Char at all and before I translated him, I looked at Pierre Boulez's score for the *Visage nuptial* to figure out whether I wanted to say the "nuptial visage" or the "nuptial countenance." Having looked at the score I realized that "countenance" was the only possibility, for it was the only word that had the same complexity and dignity as the score. The development of my translations of that very long and epic poem—which took me two years to translate, with Char's help—was another sort of score. I retranslated it last year for the BBC when Pierre Boulez went over to England to conduct the *Visage nuptial*. The repeated retranslations gave me the feeling of a dynamic setting. I longed, in my New Directions anthology of Mallarmé's writings, to put a sonnet and the alternative translations circling around it in a constellation, instead of having eternally this AB feeling that makes you feel that the translator has tried to give—as is, of course, impossible—the "full" sense of the poem. This interchange of complexity, this correspondence, works very much the

same way between translating and poetry as it does between music and poetry. I thought you might be interested in hearing one or two examples, which are the pressure points in these two poems we've just been discussing.

Then I will end by quoting Mallarmé on music because I think he's often been very misinterpreted along the musical line. In fact, I think that Mallarmé's "Un Coup de dés" is another piece that Pierre Boulez should set to music. I think of the "whites" in it—the *blancs*—these "blanks" that come up all over the place and the ways that Mallarmé analyzes them as the prismatic reflections. That's exactly the complexity that would be wonderful to hear in music.

Let me give then just two or three examples of the pressure points in René Char which might interest you. I'll take them in the order in which Pierre Boulez mentioned them. First, in the "Visage nuptial," the poem in French is non-puritanical, whereas the English language, as you may have heard and as you know, is incredibly more puritanical than the French. René Char over and over would raise his provençal hands to the sky and say "what can you do with English?" The problem was the word at the center of the poem, which is the French word *plaisir*. It doesn't exist in English, of course, because in English "pleasure" is just nowhere, having no proximity to what Char means. The word in French is both erotic and spiritual and everything central to the poem, whose real center it is. This poem is about love-making and about nuptial rites. Ok, so what were we to do? Week after week, we would have this problem, and then finally, one day, René Char, whose perception was better than his English, said to me "joy!" And I said "excuse me?" and he said "if I were doing this poem again now, I would think of the 'Visage nuptial' as rewritten around the word 'joy.'" So I used the word "joy" in my translation for "pleasure," without any footnote that says "René Char said, 'pleasure,' you know you can translate it as the English 'joy.'" In any case, these nodal points—the word that Pierre Boulez uses in some of his writings—these nodal points are the central pressure points of the poem, radiating out into a kind of vibrating resonance, making it possible for us all to retranslate what matters.

Another example I would like to give you is one of the sonnets that Pierre Boulez set to music, the one called "Une dentelle s'abolit" ("a lace annuls itself"). I won't tell you the solution, because I'm less wild about it than about the problem, as often

happens. In the sonnet, the following problem occurs: let me read you the beginning in French:

Une dentelle s'abolit
 Dans le doute du Jeu suprême
 (literally: A lace annuls itself
 In the doubt of the supreme game)

The problem is the central word there, the word *Jeu*, which you hear, if you have a French ear, immediately as both "game" or "gamble" and as "I." It is really the doubt of the self, the doubt of the "I." There's no way to translate both things at once; you have to make a choice. But the choice then means that the complexity, ideally, gets carried over to another point in the poem, and that's what I think is exciting about resetting the poem.

Then I'll read you one more problem which is determined by the central word of this whole poem: the word *lit*—like "bed," but it's also the verb for reading. So that this whole poem, which really means "a lace passes into nothingness," is also about reading, how reading passes into nothingness and complexity; it's about this clear absence of the center of the poem; it's about the flower absent from all the bouquets, which is why the bouquet gets to exist.

The last problem I bring you comes up in the very next stanza, and it goes:

Cet unanime blanc conflit
 D'une guirlande avec la même,
 (This unanimous white conflict
 of a wreath with itself)

The problem there is the first line which goes:

Cet unanime blanc conflit

which you can either read as:

This unanimous white conflict

which still has to do with the bed, of course, and with the struggle and everything else. But you could interpret it as:

This unanimous or one-voiced blank conflict

and that's how, I think, you get from that to "Un coup de dés"—with all its blow of dice which will never abolish chance—to that incredibly complex prismatic use of the white, the blank of the poem on the page. That's the extraordinary typographical, visual, peculiar, magnificent, untranslatable, wonderful poem, of which in closing, I just want to read you two lines, from its preface, which go

exactly along with what Boulez is trying to do in this wonderfully exciting structural theater of the mind as I see it. It seems to me to be exactly what we're talking about. Mallarmé says of the blanks in this poem: "These are prismatic subdivisions of the idea. This instant when they appear and during which their cooperation lasts in some exact mental setting." I imagine how the exactitudes of Boulez's renderings of Char and of Mallarmé are mental in another space—those are mental exactitudes, and mentally exciting. They are also, of course, in every other way, exciting, but Mallarmé gives us a clue to his own excitement right in this preface.

Mallarmé's speaking here of shortcuts: we are talking about getting from A to C, not via B. "Everything that happens in poetry, happens by shortcut hypothetically, storytelling is avoided. Add to that, that from this naked use of thought, retreating, prolonging, fleeing, or from its very design, there results for the person reading it aloud a musical score." A musical score.

And, I'll read you one last thing: he's talking now about the prose poem which he loves. He is, in fact, talking about this peculiar poem that I've just shown you, this peculiar never-to-be repeated experiment in poetry. You couldn't go, as Pierre Boulez says, farther than Mallarmé—impossible, you can only repeat. Of this poem, which is supposed to start poetry over, he says: "the free verse in the prose poem takes place under an influence I know to be odd, that of music as it is heard at a concert." Then he ends: "this is the empire of passion and dream, it is the time to treat, preferably as it follows naturally, subjects of pure and complex imagination or intellect, and not to exclude them from poetry, the unique source." Mallarmé is the great ancestor in this. We haven't gone farther, nor can we.

I want to end with one word, which comes from the first of the "Visage nuptial" poems, right before the long poem itself. The text is called "Conduit" or "Convey," and in it, the first word that René Char says about the notion of encounter, about love-making and about music and poetry, understanding everything else, is the word *passe*, just meaning "pass," "let's go on." So let's go on...

Nancy Perloff

Mr. Boulez began by citing the importance of modern French poetry in challenging, motivating, and inspiring his own poetic

settings. I want to take the adjective “French” and examine it, and raise some questions. I’m very interested in the kinds of sources, the kind of tradition that Mr. Boulez is speaking about. In other words, if we look at the twentieth-century tradition of French text setting, if we think of composers like Francis Poulenc or Erik Satie as well as Claude Debussy, do these composers provide a source or point of departure for the kind of setting that Mr. Boulez experiments with? I find it very interesting that the word he emphasizes strongly, the word that seems so important to him, both in the talk he gave now and in his writings, is the word “structure.” I don’t think this is a word that Poulenc or Satie would have given such emphasis. In their vocal work we would think more of “style” and of “genre.” Debussy becomes the interesting question, but let me stay with Poulenc and Satie for a moment.

The important questions regarding both Poulenc and Satie are: Did they stay with a literal transcription, an aesthetic imitation of the poetic text, or did they move from a rendering of prosody, of atmosphere and associations that the text conveys (Poulenc’s *Le Bestiaire* or *Toréador*, for example) to some larger internal structure? In the early twentieth century, didn’t Poulenc and Satie have a greater interest in creating a song style, a *mélodie*, a style in the vein of cabaret, *café-concert*, *valse chantée*, so that what defines their vocal music is as much style as the setting of individual words? Poulenc tried to create an atmosphere of Paris, a nostalgic bittersweet tone full of memories of the specific locale evoked in the poetry he was setting. As part of his direct expression of the text and his interest in style, Poulenc also sometimes imitated the performance style of certain French popular singers, especially Maurice Chevalier. This imitation could take the form of parody: Poulenc split up syllables in unusual ways, called for rubato, created passages with free rhythms and speech-like declamations.

With Debussy, we begin to move away from this imitation of poetry, this “direct imitation action,” as Mr. Boulez calls it, to poetic reflection. And very important is the notion that the text starts to be absent from the musical setting—Mr. Boulez’s idea of “center and absence”—so that as listeners we internalize the text and then hear its structure resonating in the sound structures and in formal relations in the musical setting.

In his important essay on Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Mr. Boulez describes how the vocal line in the opera detaches itself and

the instrumentation detaches itself and creates its own commentary, internalized from the specific text. Did this practice provide a tradition which Mr. Boulez amplifies, and did the Poulenc/Satie period form an early French tradition of clarity, of emphasis on style and direct setting of words, which Mr. Boulez is responding against? Is there a French tradition in which we would place Mr. Boulez, or is he moving away from such national definitions, such notions of a French spirit per se, towards a larger supranational style, a style that transcends the specific national definitions to which I've referred. These are questions that I find interesting. They may prompt us to discuss the music of Mr. Boulez in relation to German composers as well. But I think it would be interesting to define the context in which Mr. Boulez has pursued his remarkable explorations, and to clarify the role of France in this context.

A la recherche d'une voix féminine: Etude de *La Princesse de Montpensier* et de *La Princesse de Clèves* de Madame de Lafayette

Karin Schiffer

Si l'on compare deux œuvres de Madame de Lafayette, *La Princesse de Montpensier* de 1662 et *La Princesse de Clèves* de 1678, on découvre que de nombreux thèmes, qui seront développés dans le roman, sont déjà présents dans cette brève nouvelle qui fait partie de ses premières productions littéraires. L'intrigue est fort semblable: ces deux histoires mettent en scène une jeune Princesse, mariée sans amour, qui luttera toute sa vie afin de ne pas succomber à une passion adultère et donc de préserver sa vertu. Cependant, la Princesse de Montpensier mourra dans la honte et le regret d'une vie vertueuse qu'elle n'a pas su gagner, alors que la Princesse de Clèves quittera le monde laissant à son entourage "des exemples de vertu inimitables" (269).¹ Nombreuses sont les autres divergences entre cette œuvre de jeunesse et le roman achevé qu'est *La Princesse de Clèves*. Néanmoins, il est intéressant de remarquer que dans ces deux œuvres, une jeune femme cherche à trouver sa propre voix, sa propre identité au sein d'un discours imposé par la société.

La problématique de la parole—en tant que fondamentalement double—est déjà présente dans *La Princesse de Montpensier*, ébauche de toute une réflexion développée dans *La Princesse de Clèves*.² La parole n'est pas seulement double dans l'opposition entre le discours des autres et son propre discours que l'héroïne a à découvrir, mais elle est en soi porteuse de différentes interprétations possibles, souvent contradictoires. Le discours de chacun doit constamment être réévalué, retraduit afin d'en découvrir la vraie signification cachée. Cette vérité profonde semble à jamais se dérober, les quiproquos se succèdent, l'incertitude demeure.

Cette étude tentera de démontrer comment l'héroïne de ces deux œuvres cherche à s'affirmer, à trouver sa propre identité par le moyen d'un discours autre que celui imposé par la société, et comment elle ne fait en réalité que tomber dans un paradoxe

insoluble. La prise de la parole lui fait croire à la possibilité d'une liberté alors qu'elle ne fait que l'emprisonner et l'étouffer.

La cour d'Henri II présente un monde régi par un certain nombre de normes qui pourraient se résumer au seul mot de *bienséance*: le noble ne parle que de manière contrôlée, mesurée, neutre. C'est le règne du paraître: on ne peut pas dévoiler son propre point de vue ou ses propres sentiments.³ Chacun cherche alors à percevoir ce qui, dans le discours de l'autre (ou dans les signes extérieurs), peut trahir son être véritable, tout en surveillant sans cesse l'imperméabilité de son propre masque puisqu'il se sait scruté et guetté sans répit.

Cependant, les règles de ce jeu sont claires et connues de tous. Le discours de la cour est celui de la fausseté par excellence, mais qui se formule explicitement comme tel. Toute personne est consciente que son interlocuteur est en train de la tromper, de même qu'elle n'ignore pas que l'autre sait que elle-même le dupe tout autant. Le noble fait donc partie d'un groupe, qui bien qu'il fonde ses principes sur la négation du vrai, la négation de l'essence, est rassurant puisqu'il offre un cadre accepté de tous.

Les deux Princesses n'adhèrent cependant pas à ce groupe, et ceci non par leur propre choix mais parce qu'un autre discours leur a été imposé. Dans *La Princesse de Montpensier*, c'est l'ami de son mari, le comte de Chabannes qui parfait son éducation:

Chabannes, de son côté, regardait avec admiration tant de beauté, d'esprit et de vertu qui paraissaient en cette jeune Princesse, et, se servant de l'amitié qu'elle lui témoignait pour lui inspirer des *sentiments d'une vertu extraordinaire* et dignes de la grandeur de sa naissance, il la rendit en peu de temps une des personnes du monde la plus achevée (49; je souligne).

Pourtant, malgré cette première éducation qui lui fait refuser toute fausseté, elle se conformera par la suite au discours de la cour, dissimulant sans mauvaise conscience à son mari comme à tous (sauf à Chabannes, son confident) son amour pour le Duc de Guise. Néanmoins, la vertu demeure son idéal et lorsqu'elle se voit abandonnée par ce dernier, c'est ce précepte de vie qu'elle regrette et pleure. La Princesse de Montpensier sait qu'elle a failli par rapport au discours qui aurait dû être le sien (bien qu'imposé par Chabannes): le discours de la vertu.

L'éducation donnée par la mère entraîne, dans *La Princesse de Clèves*, des conséquences bien plus importantes. Madame de Chartres décrit à sa fille la cour et ses intrigues non pour qu'elle puisse y trouver sa place et se sentir faisant partie de ce groupe homogène, mais bien au contraire, pour qu'elle renie complètement les principes de sa caste et qu'elle formule un discours opposé: le discours de la vérité, de la transparence, de la vertu. La Princesse est ainsi placée hors de la norme, hors du groupe. Non seulement elle se retrouve seule dans un monde qui lui est étranger, mais elle devient la représentante d'un discours unique et extraordinaire—responsabilité bien lourde à porter. La relation aux autres est faussée; la Princesse ne sait pas ce que les autres disent parce qu'elle cherche en vain leur vérité, et les autres ne la comprennent pas non plus car elle est la seule à ne pas vouloir porter de masque.

L'enseignement de la mère est basé sur la peur: la cour est une société extrêmement dangereuse et les conséquences seront effrayantes et catastrophiques si la Princesse ne se plie pas à ses préceptes: "Mme de Chartres, qui avait eu tant d'application pour inspirer la vertu à sa fille, ne discontinua pas de prendre les mêmes soins dans un lieu où ils étaient si nécessaires et où *il y avait tant d'exemples si dangereux*" (22; je souligne).

Seulement, les préceptes imposés par la mère sont dès l'abord voués à l'échec, car ils ont comme base un paradoxe:

Mme de Chartres avait une opinion opposée; elle faisait souvent à sa fille des peintures de l'amour; ... elle lui contait *le peu de sincérité des hommes, leurs tromperies et leur infidélité, les malheurs domestiques où plongent les engagements*, et elle lui faisait voir, *d'un autre côté*, quelle tranquillité suivait la vie d'une honnête femme, et combien la vertu donnait d'éclat et d'élévation à une personne qui avait de la beauté et de la naissance; mais elle lui faisait voir aussi combien il était difficile de conserver cette vertu, *que par une extrême défiance de soi-même et un grand soin de s'attacher à ce qui seul peut faire le bonheur d'une femme, qui est d'aimer son mari et d'en être aimée* (15; je souligne).

Comme le souligne Mildred Sarag E. Greene (223), influencée par le discours de sa mère, la Princesse va craindre les hommes et va simultanément croire à la possibilité d'un amour pur et tranquille

avec son mari (personnage alors aussi extraordinaire qu'elle puisqu'il ne répond en rien à la définition commune des hommes). Le paradoxe devant lequel la Princesse est placée (ou plutôt au sein duquel elle est plongée et elle se débat) est l'affirmation simultanée d'une impossibilité à trouver le bonheur, de par la nature de l'homme, et du devoir de rechercher et trouver ce bonheur dans la vie conjugale.

Et les mots "que par une extrême défiance de soi-même" démontrent bien que le programme imposé par la mère est irréalisable, puisqu'à nouveau fondamentalement paradoxal. Afin d'atteindre cet idéal de vie, Mme de Chartres exige que sa fille renonce à son essence, qu'elle devienne non seulement différente des autres, mais différente de ce qu'elle *est* en réalité. Et comme l'énonce Marianne Hirsch, cet idéal est de devenir complètement indépendante, d'être celle qui détient le pouvoir et non celle qui est conquise par l'homme, même si c'est au prix surhumain de se désier de soi-même, de renoncer à soi-même: "For the Princess, the possibility of transcendence is enhanced by the super human control, the saintly and violent courage and effort demanded by her mother. In order to keep from being conquered by passion and by Nemours, the Princess literally has to conquer herself" (81). Marianne Hirsch va encore plus loin en affirmant que Mme de Chartres dicte à sa fille une telle conduite non pas, pour qu'en devenant indépendante vis-à-vis des hommes (vis-à-vis d'une passion aliénante) elle découvre la liberté, mais qu'elle demeure au stade de fille, et donc sous l'emprise maternelle: "The mother's lesson, then, is double-edged on the one hand, it seems to offer Mme de Clèves the possibility of autonomy and even transcendence; on the other, it traps her in a state of continued dependency and emotional infancy" (81). La passion est l'ennemi premier de Mme de Chartres, non parce qu'elle risquerait de faire souffrir sa fille, ou entâcherait sa réputation, mais plutôt parce qu'elle rompt la relation symbiotique qu'elle entretient avec sa fille (86).

Et sur son lit de mort, Mme de Chartres émet un dernier discours d'une violence telle qu'elle s'assure l'obéissance et la soumission de la Princesse:

Ayez de la force et du courage, ma fille, retirez-vous de la cour, obligez votre mari de vous emmener; ne craignez point de prendre des partis trop rudes et trop difficiles, quelque affreux qu'ils

vous paraissent d'abord: ils seront plus doux dans les suites que *les malheurs d'une galanterie*. Si d'autres raisons que celles de la *vertu* et de votre *devoir* vous pouvaient obliger à ce que je souhaite, je vous dirais que, si quelque chose était capable de troubler le bonheur de vous voir tomber *comme les autres femmes*; mais si ce malheur doit vous arriver, *je reçois la mort avec joie, pour n'en être pas le témoin* (66-67; je souligne).

Ses arguments sont toujours les mêmes: sa fille a *le devoir* de se distinguer de toutes les autres femmes, et si elle n'obéit pas aux préceptes de vertu dictés par la mère, elle ne pourra que devenir extrêmement *malheureuse*. Cette fois, Mme de Chartres va encore plus loin, elle lie sa fille par les liens subtils de la mauvaise conscience et du remords. Sa mère, au-delà de la mort, reste son juge devant qui elle devra rendre compte de sa conduite et de son discours. C'est pourquoi, toute sa vie la Princesse devra lutter pour devenir un être qu'elle n'est pas—unique dans toute la cour de France, donc à jamais seule—reniant sa propre identité, son propre discours. Paradoxalement, c'est pour libérer sa fille de l'emprise des hommes, du discours patriarcal que la mère impose à sa fille de devenir cet autre au-delà de tous, mais également au-delà d'elle-même. Et le discours de la mère—deuxième paradoxe—n'est pas moins un discours qui reflète la loi patriarcale puisqu'il annihile tout désir féminin pour se soumettre à la vertu, c'est-à-dire à la loi du mari.

Les deux Princesses, à cause de l'enseignement qu'elles ont reçu, sont en contradiction avec le discours de la cour; mais elles ne sont finalement pas les seules dans cette situation. Le noble a parfois besoin de formuler un énoncé vrai, entre autres lorsqu'il veut révéler ses vrais sentiments à la personne aimée. L'amour trouble le cadre si rassurant du discours du paraître de la cour. Il faut alors inventer un nouveau code qui ne soit compris que du destinataire visé. Ainsi, dans *La Princesse de Montpensier*, le Duc de Guise parvient à répéter l'affirmation de son amour à la Princesse, et ceci devant un public où sont présents ses deux principaux rivaux, le Duc d'Anjou et le Prince de Montpensier: "il lui dit plusieurs fois, devant tout le monde sans être entendu que d'elle, que son cœur n'avait point changé, et partit avec le Duc d'Anjou" (61). Le Duc de Guise ne lui laisse pas le loisir de répondre, et la Princesse n'aura pas d'autre occasion de lui formuler, à son tour,

son amour. Lors de l'entrevue finale, ils n'ont pas le temps de se parler car la voix irritée de Chabannes attire aussitôt le mari. Cependant, cette Princesse ne cesse de raconter sa passion au comte de Chabannes, comme si son amour devait être répété pour prendre forme, pour s'affirmer comme réel. Néanmoins, la parole vraie s'entache déjà ici de duplicité puisqu'elle n'est pas pur chant d'amour mais également—simultanément—une arme cruelle qui blesse toujours plus profondément l'auditeur, le comte de Chabannes, celui que la Princesse sait être fou amoureux d'elle.

Dans *La Princesse de Clèves*, le discours amoureux est tout aussi difficile à formuler, et s'énonce alors souvent de manière oblique. L'amant interprète les paroles et les actions de l'être aimé qu'un tiers lui rapporte (épisode du bal chez le maréchal de Saint-André); montre qu'il sait qu'il a été vu et que le silence sur le délit causé est compris comme preuve d'amour (lorsque Nemours vole le portrait de la Princesse); ou encore, il ne cesse de rougir, de s'encoubler, de faire des sorties précipitées.... Et chaque fois, Nemours s'arrangera pour signifier à la Princesse de Clèves qu'il déchiffre ses marques comme de nouvelles déclarations d'amour. Cependant, Nemours a besoin d'entendre l'affirmation de l'amour, pour que celui-ci soit scellé par l'autorité de la parole.⁴ Tant que la Princesse ne lui aura pas avoué directement sa passion, il ne pourra être sûr des signes entraperçus; leur amour ne pourra pas être réel et encore moins vécu. Mais la jeune Princesse ne peut répondre à cette demande, car elle aussi connaît le poids de la parole. Si elle formulait sans détours son amour, ce serait alors avouer l'emprise du discours de la passion sur le discours de la vertu. Et en mémoire de sa mère, c'est ce dernier discours qui doit être à tout prix maintenu, et même triomphant.

Ici, l'héroïne ne peut partager avec personne la découverte et l'évolution de sa passion; elle n'a pas de confidant, bien que la mère se soit proposée comme telle. La Princesse de Clèves ne peut évidemment pas lui parler car Mme de Chartres représente justement l'interdit du discours du désir.⁵

Dans ces deux œuvres, le discours de la vérité ne peut s'énoncer; les personnages rêvent d'une communication transparente, directe, comme si la parole avait le pouvoir d'éterniser leurs sentiments. Mais comme ils ne peuvent atteindre cet idéal de communication, ils s'expriment par l'entremise de narrations qui semblent fortuites mais qui en réalité révèlent leur vrai discours. Néanmoins, comme

l'explique Dalia Judovitz dans son article "The Aesthetics of Implausibility: *La Princesse de Clèves*" (1043), ces histoires véhiculent elles aussi une parole double, sujette à de multiples interprétations. Lorsque son mari lui raconte l'histoire de son ami Sancerre, la Princesse ne l'écoute pas vraiment mais l'entend uniquement comme un appel à la sincérité. La Princesse, démangée par sa mauvaise conscience, ne peut comprendre cette narration que comme faisant écho à ses propres préoccupations: son mari, en lui racontant les tromperies subies par Sancerre, ne fait que lui reprocher sa fausseté. L'aveu naît donc d'une interprétation erronée du discours de l'autre!

Dans son article "The Poetics of Supression," Joan De Jean propose que l'aveu n'est pas seulement la reconnaissance d'une faute et une demande de pardon, mais bien plus l'affirmation du propre discours de la Princesse. Par cette première prise de parole, elle tente de trouver sa propre identité, de devenir enfin *sujet* de sa propre histoire: "The *aveu* represents the first attempt on Madame de Clèves' part to break free of all those seeking to control the narrative of her life—her mother, her husband, her lover—and to create a story that, because it is without precedent, is uniquely hers and unable to be taken over by anyone else" (92). Dire qui elle est, signifie pour la Princesse formuler son amour et son désir d'amour. Et c'est bien ce que comprend son mari; la Princesse croit énoncer une parole qui la replace sous la domination de son mari, mais c'est son discours inconscient qui se laisse entendre. Par cet aveu, le Prince de Clèves réalise que sa femme lui échappe à jamais. Les paroles de son épouse le mettent face à sa tragédie: être en même temps mari et amant, alors que par définition ces deux termes s'excluent l'un l'autre: "This internal difference or double identity that marks M. de Clèves character has now become a paradox that cannot be overcome" (Judovitz 1048).

Néanmoins, si le Prince découvre brusquement le vrai discours de sa femme, celle-ci ne contrôle pas pour autant cette nouvelle voix. Comme le souligne Richard H. Moye, la Princesse perd toute emprise sur sa parole puisqu'aussitôt son discours est approprié, interprété, jugé par les autres: "The danger in telling a story of passion, clearly, is that one cannot control how that story is perceived once it becomes public property" (853). La Princesse doit alors non seulement renoncer à son histoire mais la renier, puisqu'elle affirme à la reine Dauphine qu'une telle parole est impossible: "Cette

histoire ne me paraît guère vraisemblable..."(182). La Princesse n'a plus d'identité, elle se fond dans l'anonymat tout en devenant une sorte de figure irréelle, "celle qui a fait un tel aveu" et que tout le monde juge.⁶

Toute tentative de contrôle sur la parole échoue. La Princesse n'a pas—pas plus que tout autre—une quelconque emprise sur le langage. Elle interprète la parole des autres de manière erronée, comme les autres s'approprient et ne comprennent pas son discours, ou entendent ce que justement elle voulait taire. Dans l'œuvre de Madame de Lafayette, aucun personnage n'est capable d'accéder à ce contrôle tant recherché. Même la mère, exemple absolu de la Princesse, ne réussit pas dans cette démarche. Elle parvient à faire le nom de l'héroïne de l'histoire qu'elle nous rapporte, mais le lecteur n'aura pas de peine à la reconnaître elle-même dans cette figure exemplaire, qui pourtant elle aussi a succombé au pouvoir de la passion!⁷ La conduite imposée à la Princesse serait alors moins la continuation de sa propre vie vertueuse que le désir de voir triompher sa fille là où elle-même a failli!

Ces deux œuvres de Madame de Lafayette ne signifient pas seulement que le langage est incontrôlable, mais encore qu'il existe un danger réel à mal l'interpréter. Les personnages s'embourbent dans des quiproquos, et le résultat peut en être fatal. Dans *La Princesse de Montpensier*, Chabannes est pris par le Prince de Montpensier pour l'amant de sa femme. Il se place lui-même dans cette position, afin de sauver la Princesse du déshonneur, mais également peut-être pour représenter celui qu'il aurait tellement voulu être: l'amant! Et son désespoir n'est pas d'être vu dans cette situation, mais bien plutôt que ce discours ne soit que mensonge. Le Prince de Montpensier ne s'y laisse d'ailleurs pas prendre; il voit bien que Chabannes n'énonce pas le triomphe de l'amant, seulement le rêve de cette gloire: "Répondez-moi l'un ou l'autre, leur dit-il, et éclairez-moi d'une aventure que je ne puis croire telle qu'elle me paraît" (95). Le Prince sait que Chabannes lui cache quelque chose, et c'est ce mystère, cet autre inconnu qu'il craint. Le quiproquo ne se résoud que très difficilement, le Prince ne saura jamais qui était réellement avec sa femme. Pouvoir sortir du quiproquo équivaut alors à pouvoir se sauver d'un danger imminent, et devient une question de vie ou de mort. Le comte de Chabannes meurt par une stupide méprise; victime innocente, toujours soupçonné à tort, il est trouvé massacré par le Prince, qui ne peut

comprendre que le quiproquo continue, se moquant tragiquement d'eux.⁸

Dans *La Princesse de Clèves*, le Prince de Clèves fait écho au personnage de Chabannes. Non seulement l'aveu détruit ses illusions, mais leur couple est rongé par le quiproquo qui s'ensuit: l'éénigme de la publication de cette parole qui représentait leur secret. Chacun accuse l'autre et ne peut croire sa dénégation puisqu'en toute logique l'autre est le seul à connaître l'aveu donc à pouvoir parler. La confiance est détruite et l'autre est coupable d'avoir dit la parole qui leur appartenait, car elle révélait leur identité (la Princesse y formulait son identité de femme habitée par l'amour et faisait découvrir au Prince son paradoxe, être à la fois mari et amant). Leur relation n'évolue que sur ces bases faussées; le quiproquo ne sera résolu qu'à la fin du roman, lors de l'entrevue entre la Princesse et Nemours, où elle apprendra enfin comment sa parole s'est divulguée dans toute la cour. Le Prince, lui, mourra sans avoir connu la résolution de ce mystère. De plus, sa mort est également causée par une méprise des signes. Cette fois c'est lui qui commet l'erreur interprétative: lorsqu'il apprend que Nemours est entré dans le parc de Coloummiers, il ne peut comprendre cet acte que comme la conquête de sa femme. Le Prince se trompe, Nemours ne possède pas sa femme et ne la possédera jamais. Mais simultanément il saisit la vérité car Nemours est celui qui pourrait la posséder, celui qui, dans les rêves de la Princesse, est son amant. Le Prince est "Mort par erreur sans doute, mais par une erreur qui ne faisait que refléter une certitude trop véritable, celle de ne pas être aimé d'amour" (Mesnard 70). D'une œuvre à l'autre, le quiproquo évolue. Il tue de manière tragique et incompréhensible dans *La Princesse de Montpensier*, révélant la cruauté de la parole qui frappe l'innocent, alors que dans *La Princesse de Clèves*, il tue non tant parce que les signes sont mal interprétés, mais parce que la parole est en réalité comprise et n'est pas supportable.

C'est pourquoi, ces deux œuvres aboutissent au silence. La Princesse de Montpensier ne peut supporter l'arrêt des lettres du Duc de Guise; le dialogue d'amour avorte, la Princesse n'a plus à qui parler (même Chabannes n'est plus là pour écouter ses épanchements). Le silence est subi et compris comme négation de la vie, la Princesse ne peut que mourir. Tandis que dans *La Princesse de Clèves*, c'est la Princesse qui décide de se taire. Son discours n'est pas formulable; elle ne peut que répéter le discours qui lui a été

imposé par sa mère puis par son mari.⁹ Son discours devient alors celui du "non-dit"; la Princesse se retire, vit seule son désir et le plaisir du désir dans une sorte de rêve éveillé. Lorsque le Duc de Nemours interrompt sa rêverie dans le pavillon de Coloummiers, la Princesse ne peut tolérer une telle intrusion, la réalité détruisant la réalité du songe. L'amour parfait ne peut se vivre qu'au stade de représentation, et ce n'est que tel que la Princesse peut en jouir.¹⁰

Le discours de la Princesse devient silence. On pourrait considérer le refus de la parole comme un triomphe, signifiant dans cette négation du discours, la maîtrise de cette parole incessamment fuyante, double, cruelle. Personne n'échappe à l'échec de son discours. La Princesse refuse d'être manipulée par cette parole qui se joue de tous; c'est pourquoi elle se tait. Cependant ce silence n'est pas une victoire. La Princesse, recluse dans un couvent, annihile toute sa féminité et finalement son humanité. Au moment où elle contrôle enfin sa passion et sa vie, celles-ci cessent. Le contrôle—en niant la liberté—tue les sentiments, tue la possibilité d'être: "if the Princesse's victory consists of the establishment of *repos* over the flux of passion, then it is necessary to see the price of that victory, of that control, as the cessation of development and passion, even of life" (Moyle 846).

Ces deux œuvres se ferment sur le silence de l'héroïne, sur la négation du discours du désir, mais surtout sur la victoire éclatante de la vertu. *La Princesse de Montpensier* est l'exemple du déshonneur qui attend celle qui ne respecte pas le discours du devoir, et *La Princesse de Clèves* est l'illustration de la femme vertueuse par excellence, qui vainc tout autre discours. Ces deux récits s'achèvent sur l'affirmation du discours patriarcal, la recherche du discours féminin se solde d'un échec.¹¹

Néanmoins, et c'est le dernier retournement que nous propose *La Princesse de Clèves*, si la Princesse ne peut formuler son discours, se taisant devant le triomphe du discours de la mère et du mari, c'est un reproche silencieux au monde patriarcal qui s'énonce implicitement: "The Princesse de Clèves is at peace (in one piece) with herself and, as a literary model, dies the "euphoric" dysphoric heroine. But her death, the death of a dream, is also a silent reproach to patriarchy" (Richardson-Viti 15). Dans son article "Pour ne pas en finir avec 'La Princesse de Clèves' ou du 'dire' comme mode du 'faire,'" Thérèse Lassale-Maraval cite un passage des *Mots et les choses* de Michel Foucault pour montrer combien ce roman de

Madame de Lafayette s'inscrit dans le discours classique qui cherche à nommer, à trouver le nom qui donne l'identité: "Le nom, c'est la trame du discours. Et peut-être toute la littérature classique se loge-t-elle en cet espace, dans ce mouvement pour atteindre ce nom toujours redoutable parce qu'il tue, en l'épuisant, la possibilité de parler" (308). *La Princesse de Clèves* s'inscrit dans cet espace de la recherche du nom, un lieu qui, dans cette œuvre, se présente comme la déstabilisation de toute interprétation, de toute signification. Madame de Lafayette a besoin d'une parole double, à jamais insaisissable, indéfinissable, pour dire (et c'est probablement inconsciemment qu'elle réalise cette démarche) qu'en filigrane du triomphe du discours patriarcal s'écrit la dénonciation de ce même discours, c'est-à-dire la possibilité d'un autre discours, spécifiquement féminin. La voix de la femme ne peut encore éclater au grand jour. Si l'œuvre de Madame de Lafayette signifie que cette voix doit être tue, elle ne dit pas moins que cette parole existe.

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Notes

1. La pagination fait référence à l'édition de *La Princesse de Clèves* mentionnée dans la bibliographie.

2. C'est pourquoi mon travail va surtout se baser sur *La Princesse de Clèves*. Cette œuvre développe de manière beaucoup plus étendue et riche ce qui n'est qu'à peine suggéré dans *La Princesse de Montpensier*. Mais c'est en comparant les deux que l'on peut réaliser l'ampleur qu'a acquise la problématique de la parole dans l'œuvre de Madame de Lafayette.

3. C'est ce qu'explique Jeanine Anseaume Kreiter dans *Le problème du paraître*: "Chacun s'efforce de se présenter conforme à l'idéal professé . . . Poussé par son propre intérêt, celui-ci tend à exceller dans sa représentation, aliénant alors son moi, qui reste nécessairement "autre." Le décalage entre la personnalité sociale et l'essence des individus devient contradiction: ils ne peuvent paraître ce qu'ils sont" (20).

4. Thérèse Lassal-Maraval souligne le rapport qui existe entre la formulation et l'acte proprement dit: "rencontre du moi et de l'autre dans un "dire" qui est en même temps un "faire," ou un "dire l'amour" à quoi se ramènera un "faire l'amour" conçu ici comme l'accomplissement d'une passion" (Lassalle-Maraval 309).

5. Roger Duchêne dans son article "Les deux Princesses sont-elles d'un même auteur" met en parallèle l'expansivité de la Princesse de Montpensier et le silence, la solitude de la Princesse de Clèves.

6. Richard H. Moye montre combien la Princesse est placée devant un choix impossible, soit révéler être l'auteur de l'aveu, scandale qu'elle ne peut affronter, soit perdre tout contrôle sur sa narration et donc sur son identité: "Ultimately, the Princess's conflict is between laying claim to a story that is distinctly and uniquely hers and preserving her anonymity by divorcing herself from a story that now belongs to its audience" (853).

7. "Moreover, given the limited cast of characters in this novel and the restricted size of the world of the Court, it does not take a great deal of speculation on the reader's part to identify Mme de Chartres as the very woman whose story she narrates.... But the irony is double: if we say that Mme de Chartres herself is the anonymous woman of her story, we are falling into the pattern of *à clef* reading, or reading by naming, that De Jean shows is a crucial concern for Lafayette. Falling into that trap, however, forces us to see what the Princess finally sees: no matter how great one's sense of control in telling a story, no matter how hard one tries to maintain anonymity, once a story is told, the narrator has lost control" (Moye 854-55).

8. "Il fut d'abord saisi d'étonnement à ce pitoyable spectacle. Ensuite, son amitié se réveillant lui donna de la douleur; mais enfin le souvenir de l'offense qu'il croyait en avoir reçue lui donna de la joie, et il fut bien aise de se voir vengé par la fortune" (99).

9. Comme l'explique Marianne Hirsch, même lors de l'entrevue finale avec Nemours, la Princesse énonce un discours qui n'est pas le sien (82-83).

10. Michael Moriarty démontre que l'amour n'est vécu que basé sur l'absence de l'être aimé: "What seems to be an elaborate message calling eloquently for his presence is in fact so firmly predicated on his absence that, in attempting to answer the call (by entering the room), he aborts the message. By seeking to coincide with his image in the field of the Princess's gaze, he causes the gaze to be averted; for when she sees him instead of his image she leaves the room" (67). Dalia Judovitz souligne le paradoxe inhérent à cette conception de l'amour puisque l'amour absolu—qui ne peut être vécu que fantasmé—signifie sa propre négation, ne pouvant être réel: "The incident in the Pavillon, when Nemours observes the Princess (as voyeur) and then tries to intercept her, fails because of her denial of his presence. Once again, the representation of the scene of absolute love becomes the sign of its negation as well" (1050).

11. "Yet in the process of questioning, vacillation and repetition that takes her to *tranquilité* and to death, she does discover passion. In her efforts to understand this passion, she does develop a truncated discourse of her own. But her subversive, private and brief journey of self-discovery only reaffirms old affiliations" (Hirsch 86).

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Mon semblable, ma mère: Woman, Subjectivity and Escape in *Les Fleurs du Mal*

Amy Ransom

Unable to control the world around him, Baudelaire took every measure to control that which was in his power, his work. Not merely a haphazard collection of diverse verses, *Les Fleurs du Mal* appears as a whole, each poem relating dynamically to the others around it, allowing a new meaning to the notion of the recueil. Critics have attached the links of the chain composed by the various *Fleurs* in different manners, some, like D. J. Mossop, going so far as to read in it an almost novelistic structure. In *Baudelaire's Tragic Hero* (1961), he examines Baudelaire's creation as a *Bildungsroman*, recounting the tragic disillusionment of its poet-hero, a sort of Everyman on a quest for happiness, happiness that he cannot obtain because of his ill-fated destiny, his penchant for *le Mal*. This quest for happiness translates into a search for pleasure, which I will define in Freudian terms as a release from unpleasurable tension resulting from the frustrations of real life. In this quest, the theme of escape plays a central role, and the figure of the woman often provides the means of the poet's evasion from a harsh, unpleasant, spleen-filled reality. This privileged position as a vehicle of escape resides in a relationship between the feminine roles as object of ideal beauty and sexual desire, and as a maternal force of fantasized return to a paradisiacal state of fulfillment before the fall into reality that subjective differentiation marks.

The Baudelairean tragedy described by Mossop is the irreparability of this fall, the futility of the poet's attempts to escape reality by striving to attain the Ideal, to operate a return to fulfillment by leaving the material behind. This tragedy plays itself out in six cycles outlined by Mossop, in which the hero sinks progressively farther from his ideal of happiness. For Mossop, the Ideal is a "state of pleasurable excitement towards which man is constantly striving..." while Spleen, its contrary, ranges from "merely consciousness of the absence of excitement..." to outright suffering (17). Supplementing Mossop's theory with Freud's conception of the Pleasure Principle as outlined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

(1961), and Emmanuel Adatte's notion of the Baudelairean flight from reality in *Les Fleurs du Mal et le Spleen de Paris: Essai sur le dépassement du réel* (1986), my reading of what Mossop terms the "architecture" of the *Fleurs* assigns to the Ideal an opposite function. Adatte effectively argues that Baudelaire's two major poetic works represent the poet's attempts to transcend the real, the physical, sensory world of human existence, in which he finds only frustration and spleen. This notion parallels Freud's conception of the death drive, which seeks to go beyond the pleasure principle and its psychic submission to the reality principle, by which the ego's attempts to fulfill its desires must constantly submit to the strictures of its own physical capacities and the desires of others. The Freudian schema formulates pleasure in a manner completely opposite to that of Mossop, for pleasure is not "excitement," but in fact, absence of excitement, release from the physical tension caused by sensory stimulus.

This analysis of pleasure forms one of the bases of my readings of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. I posit that the Baudelairean Ideal, opposed to the real as outlined by Adatte, parallels the nirvanic "beyond" of the pleasure principal, which is, at once, total absence of stimulus and complete fulfillment of desire. That is, Baudelaire's tragic poet-hero searches not for Mossop's Ideal of "pleasurable excitement,"¹ but rather he seeks an ideal means of escape from the unpleasurable reality of life. This escape, unrepresentable as it transcends the symbolic expression of the real, can only be likened to the *au-delà* or the *en-deçà*, to a return to the womb or to death itself. This notion turns around the woman, who figures as both the original source of pleasure (through her role as mother) and as object of sexual and visual desire for the male hero. Before birth, the human being resides within the womb of the mother, and after death, the human is interred in the womb-like structure of the grave. As the figure of the womb/tomb, the woman represents both the *en deçà* and the *au-delà* sought in the flight from reality.

As an escape from the reality of existence, this flight relates to the issue of subjectivity so problematic in Baudelaire. In psychoanalytical terms, before it recognizes itself as subject, the infant knows itself only as part of the mother. Subjectivity and desire only come about through the rupture of this period of union with the mother, in the womb and at the breast, which represents a complete fulfillment of needs. This rupture with the paradisiacal

moment of the ignorance of lack (of the mother) posits both the individual's separateness and its desire for fulfillment of needs. Forever after, the subject will be torn by the knowledge of its isolation in separation and by the tension of drives desiring fulfillment. After this irremediable rupture, after this Fall (for the biblical fall was a fall into self-consciousness), the only hope for the subject lies in a beyond which will imitate this original moment of un-(self)-conscious unity.

The agonistic knowledge of the split nature of the subject, as cut-off (or castrated) from others and from pleasure is the spleen of Baudelaire. His poetry represents an attempt to fill the void of the lack caused by this rupture. As a separated, self-conscious, lacking, desiring subject, Baudelaire's hero finds himself an outsider "knocking at the door of the sanctum from which he feels expelled."² Having been born, the poet has been expelled from the sanctum of the womb. As a man, he finds himself doubly excluded because of his inability to work through his own birth trauma by giving birth to another and his only means of redemption appears through writing. He can escape his tragic fate and undo this fall through various fantasies, among these: writing a return to the womb, the privileged moment of union with the mother; defying differentiation in boundary-obscuring acts of sexual or spiritual "union"; taking control of the power of the womb by operating a poetic parthenogenesis or by violating, dissecting the womb to seize it—all means of escaping the reality of the split that forces lack, desire, unpleasurable tension.

The hero of Baudelaire's tragedy closely resembles the portraits of various artists made by Colin Wilson in *The Outsider* (1956). He describes a personality type that appears both as characters in literature and as literary figures themselves, a type that casts itself outside the norms of society and which, worshiping at the altar of death, opts for the negative in the ultimate question "To be or not to be." The Outsider is cut off from society by his desire, which does not conform to that of the average man. Yet his uniqueness is not in the oddity of his desire, but in the fact that he does not repress it as others do. He stands for Truth in that he acknowledges the *Mal* that others hide; he is "a man who knows himself to be degenerate, diseased, self-divided" (14). While he honestly acknowledges his sickness and that of society, "the Outsider's chief desire is *to cease to be an Outsider*" (105, Wilson's emphasis). Hindered by the frustra-

tions of real life, he finds himself impotent to operate the changes necessary to do so: he can't be true to himself and simply conform, yet he hasn't the physical or psychological resources to gain control and effect real social or political changes upon others or his environment that would allow his reinsertion. Thus his ultimate choice becomes not "to cease to be an Outsider," but simply "to cease to be," bringing us back to the options of the before and the beyond of existence, the womb or the tomb.

This is exactly the type one sees in Baudelaire himself in the *Journaux intimes* and in the poet-hero of *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Le Spleen de Paris*. Baudelaire attempts to gain control, to cease to be an Outsider, through his work: on a real level, he wishes to gain control over his surroundings through his verse, that is, by becoming an important and influential man in society, a great poet and he symbolically controls those elements of his surroundings, *le réel* of Adatte, that frustrate him by escaping the physical into his imagined ideal, and even further, interfering in its basic elements of time and space to create an immortal reality of his own through verse. This project is tragically damned because the poet is essentially an outsider because he wishes to create/recreate/procreate not any real thing, but the Ideal. That is, he wishes to escape, to transcend the reality of the physical and immortalize himself, not as others do, through sexual reproduction, but through the ideal forms of verse.

Baudelaire's ambivalence toward sexuality and women has been studied by feminist critics like Jean Anderson, Tamara Bassim and Christine Buci-Glucksmann. This ambivalence relates to the elemental struggle between Spleen and Ideal, reality and pleasure, life and death being played out in the "tragedy" of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. While the principle of *s'enivrer* guides the poet-hero in his search for the Ideal, the tragedy is the illusory and addictive nature of the escape which becomes increasingly necessary to support life. Baudelaire's subject-hero, governed by the pleasure principle, desires an end to all this pressure, all these stimuli, seeking the total gratification of desire he had in the womb. The sexual and visual gratification provided by the beautiful woman offers a means of temporary escape, as does the power of imagination, yet it ultimately appears that death provides the only permanent solution to his problem.

On both a real and conceptual level, women hold a privileged, but ambivalent, symbolic role in Baudelaire's work as representa-

tions of both the absence causing desire and of the presence that can fill the lack, restoring the subject to the original state of paradise. The female body, Baudelaire's *beau navire*, at once represents the means of escape from the tragedy of self-consciousness, yet is also ultimately to blame for his tragic position, being "of woman born." Woman's fault in the hero's tragedy is clearly stated in the first poem of the body of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. "Bénédiction" represents the poet-child's birth as a divine punishment for the mother's sexual sin: "Maudite soit la nuit aux plaisirs éphémères/Où mon ventre a conçu mon expiation!" (l. 7-8). Giving birth to her son, the mother curses him with his own existence, a curse all the women in his life will repeat through cruelty and unfaithfulness. What places the subject-poet in the unhappy position in which he finds himself is precisely the subjectivity, the desire of the mother, of the woman herself. The Fall/fault is hers in a double sense. First, a woman's sin, the mother's sexual desire for the father, represents the ultimate cause of the poet's being brought into the curse of life. Secondly, feminine desire and feminine subjectivity prevent both mother and wife/mistress from maintaining the paradisiacal bliss of the original couple, imagined as the plenitude of the mother/child dyad. Cursed, the poet-child is abandoned by the women in his life as they pursue their own desires, and ultimately that is why he wants.

The tragedy represented by *Les Fleurs du Mal* plots out the course of the poet-hero's voyage of escape from the burden of consciousness of the wanting, desiring self—a voyage damned from its inception by its very nature: by definition, that self must accept its separation from the mother, from the woman in order to exist. The fantastic voyage constantly referred to in Baudelaire's work consists of the fantasized fulfillment of this feared desire to undo the separation, to reach the beyond of the pleasure principle, found only in death or in the mother's womb. The dynamic caused by the poet-hero's alternating hope for deliverance from and resigned acceptance of his damnation is represented in three groups of poems. The first cycle (*Fleurs XII-XIV*) has been called "le chant de l'évasion" by Marcel Ruff (Mossop 105). These poems point to the poet-hero's efforts to effect a spatial or temporal escape from reality through symbolically feminine vehicles. This effort extends as well to those cycles identified by Mossop as directly related to real women in Baudelaire's life, "The Cycle of the White Venus" (*Fleurs XL-XLVIII*), the poems directed to Mme Sabatier, and "The

"Cycle of the Green-Eyed Venus" (*Fleurs* XLIX-LIV), whose dedicatee (to use Ross Chambers' term) remains a subject of debate.

"Le chant de l'évasion" is comprised of "La vie antérieur," "Bohémiens en voyage," and "L'invitation au voyage." These three poems all propose some type of escape for the poet-narrator. The title of the first, "La vie antérieur," (*Fleurs* XII) gives a clear notion of the type of escape involved: an escape to a paradisiacal past before the fall. In addition, if we read "anterior" as the opposite of "posterior," and refer to the analogous antonym pair "ventral" and "dorsal," we realize then that this preceding life, this past life, represents life in the *ventre*, in the womb. The first strophe establishes the womb-image as the "vastes portiques" (l. 1) defined by Robert as a "galerie ouverte soutenue par deux rangées de colonnes," whose "grands piliers" (l. 3) mirror two legs rising up to make them resemble "grottes" (l. 4). The second strophe begins "Les houles," recalling the sea and forming the French homonym: la mer=la mère. The rolling waves remind of the rocking maternal *bercement* noted by Bersani (42-45), whose rhythm and the "tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique" (l. 7) reflect the undulations of the Kristevan semiotic, the pre-symbolic forms associated with the plenitude of imaginary expression, the omnipotence of the pre-Oedipal mother, not castrated by the symbolic expressions of language, in which the signifier is eternally cut-off from the signified.

This womb-like imaging of past life recalls to the poet, in the third stanza, the pleasure and fulfillment experienced in it: "C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes" (l. 9). This last oxymoron reveals the nature of pleasure within the prenatal paradise of the womb. While an excitement-based reading of pleasure like that of Mossop dictates that a *volupté* be anything but calm, my reading of the Baudelairean concept of pleasure resolves the contradiction in effect here. As a state of complete fulfillment of desire, to such an extent that desire does not even yet exist for the undifferentiated subject, the mythicized union of the mother/child dyad represents a state of *voluptés calmes*, pleasures free of tension. In the "beyond" of the pleasure principle—in the womb, at the breast, in death—only voluptuous, sensual, desiring pleasures exist. The "beyond" is calm in the sense that the tension of non-fulfillment would be completely absent—desire and fulfillment would be simultaneous, as for the infant bathing in the warm sea of the amniotic fluid. The

mother figure can even be seen in the slaves, “imprégnés d’odeurs” (1.11), who serve the poet-hero in this past life. They are pregnant, full of the *odor di femina*, perhaps and the poet is their “unique soin.” They are solely devoted to him, to keeping his “secret douloureux,” which is the secret sin, the fall, requisite to his existence but which he refuses to face in this poem.

The idealized life of carried child for whom the breast is always available to fulfill his needs, appears again in “Les Bohémiens en voyage” (*Fleurs XIII*). As ontogeny reflects phylogeny for Freud, Baudelaire allows his fantasy of individual union in the womb to wander with the Bohemians, a more “primitive” people who, unlike the urban-industrial bourgeois, experienced life in greater union with nature. The feminine and prophetic/poetic gypsy tribe leaves on its journey of continual escape with the child: “Sur son dos, ou livrant à leurs fiers appétits/Le trésor toujours prêt des mamelles pendantes” (l. 3-4). Cybele, the earth-mother, magically offers her resources (“Fait couler le rocher et fleurir le désert” (l. 12)) to these visionaries who, unrestrained by the enemy time, may see “L’empire familier des ténèbres futures” (l. 14). While the poet perceives this prophetic vision as a blessing, he notes that the future—his own present bears a dark, unpleasant, shadowy aspect.

The relationship of the child to the mother, and the subjective tensions related to the desire for escape, appear more clearly in “L’homme et la mer” (*Fleurs XIV*). The homonym *mer=mère* in the title of this poem allows it to be repositioned as “l’homme est la mère,” a version of Lacan’s mirror stage. Here the developing subject confronts its difference, its separateness from the mother by seeing itself reflected in the mirror, a mirror she also represents as she reflects back through love or rejection an image of itself, of its own desirability, to the child. One can read “La mer est ton miroir” (l. 2), literally as the myth of Narcissus, the man looking in the water and falling in love with his own reflection, but when one reads “la mère est ton miroir” one realizes that the man sees his reflection in the mother. He sees himself in her, he seeks his identity in her gaze, in the reflection of her desire. Through poetic reversal and word play, he can also make the mother become his image: she becomes a reflection of him and reflects what he wishes to see. He can undo her subjectivity, undo the damning of his birth in “Bénédiction” as he re-creates both her and himself.

The problematic nature of identity becomes apparent as the poem begins with a paradox: "Homme libre, toujours tu chériras la mer" (l. 1). He who is free, *libre*, *qui n'a pas d'attache, s'attache*, borrowing Robert's synonym for *cherir*, we observe that the man ties himself to the mother/sea with the eternally (*toujours*) binding force of affection. As he becomes bound to his reflection in the sea, throughout the rest of the poem, like Narcissus to his image in the pond, one sees that the freedom of self-reflection is really a lie, that the self can not conceive of itself without the mirror of the mother and cannot be conceived without an-other. When the poet tells him(self), "La mer est ton miroir; tu contemplates ton âme/Dans le déroulement infini de sa lame" (l. 2-3), he sees his soul reflected, not in a mirror-image of himself, but in the eternal rocking of the mother. *La mer/mère* is the (m)other, described by Madelon Sprengnether, the original other/object against which his identity/subjectivity must develop. He also discovers that his "esprit n'est pas un gouffre moins amer" (l. 4). His mind, his soul, not just his body, *n'est pas = naît/pas un gouffre*. It is born out of the separation from the *gouffre* of the womb. He is not the womb or the mother, but without the mother, for he is *moins amer = moins [l]a mère*: he is born, less [than] a mother. In the contemplation of the sea, the man perceives his own inadequacy against nature, and his own reproductive inadequacy. Yet he replaces the *gouffre* with the mind. If the woman can reproduce sexually, he then will (re)produce with his mind, poetically. He is not the mother, still he is her as she reflects his image. He is not her as he has no womb, yet he is her equal because he has a mind.

At the heart of this self-contemplation in the (m)other lies pleasure, or rather pleasure lies at the breast of the mother: "Tu te plais à plonger au sein de ton image" (l. 5). In an instance of psychological folding-back, overlapping, the narcissistic poet enjoys his own reflection, knows the infantile pleasure at the breast of his image in the mirror/mother, and experiences the sexual pleasure of genital penetration. As the poet accuses the man—"Tu l'embrasses des yeux et des bras" (l. 6)—the "innocent" desire for the mother's breast becomes sexual fantasy, at once incestuous and narcissistic, and ultimately parthenogenetic. This pleasure of plunging himself into the breast appears highly suspect when read in the context of sadistic, misogynistic fantasies which can be found in "À

celle qui est trop gaie," when the poet plunges phallic knives into women's breasts, simultaneously raping and killing them.

L'homme literally dives into his own image, embracing himself, but in this diving-in, heminges his existence with that of the water, he plunges into the amniotic depths, and hearing his own heartbeat, becomes confused: "ton cœur/Se distrait quelquefois de sa propre rumeur/Au bruit de cette plainte indomptable et sauvage" (l. 6-8). In addition to the odd visual doubling caused by the "image" in the water read as both a narcissistic reflection of the self and the mirror image of the mother, this doubling continues on an auditory level. The poet, somewhat like the protagonist of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," hesitates and *se/distrait*—separates himself and splits—as he hears his own heartbeat doubled. Returning to that *unheimlich* place "the former *heim* (home) of all human beings, to the place where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning" (Freud "The Uncanny" 51), he experiences an uncanny moment, that is, the womb experience reflects a time when the one person hears two heartbeats: the child feels its own and its mother's, while the mother feels her own and the child's. A problem, however, arises here: whose heartbeat takes precedence? Who is the person and who the image? Which one is the subject, mother-sea or child-poet?

That there are two similar, but distinct presences in the poem becomes clear in the third stanza:

Vous êtes tous les deux ténébreux et discrets:
Homme, nul n'a sondé le fond de tes abîmes;
O mer, nul ne connaît tes richesses intimes... (l. 9-11).

The narrator separates the man from his narcissistic image here, but places him in union with the *mer/mère*. They are "deux" and "discrets," two separate, discrete and discreet beings, hiding the secret of incestuous desire at the heart of which is their own narcissism, as they each love the image of him- or herself reflected in the other. Seeking pleasure gazing at his own image in the sea, the poet fantasizes an incestuous union with his mother that allows him to create himself, realizing the parthenogenetic act that permits him to be both father and son.⁴ But necessary to the real success of this fantasized self-loving, self-creation is the virginity of the mother: to erase her unfaithfulness to the son, he must write out her contamination, her sin with the father, a writing-out established in this stanza. Both mother/sea and the man maintain their integrity,

are unsullied by intimate contact as “nul ne connaît [l]es richesses intimes” of the virgin sea, and the man is whole, unpenetrated because no one knows “le fond de [s]es abîmes.” They keep this secret to themselves: “Tant vous êtes jaloux de garder vos secrets!” (12). The virginity and the secrecy, the no one knowing—in both biblical and secular senses—allows their return to Edenic ignorance and purifies any potential sin. Thus we have a nearly perfect fantasy of the pure, pre-fall union of the mother/child dyad, in which the poet creates himself until the last stanza.

What has seemed like a carefully guarded secret of blissful self-embracing in self-contemplation becomes an eternal battle. This man versus nature battle metaphorically represents the battle for subjective primacy: who gets to be on top? Man versus woman, son versus mother: who is really the subject, who is hearing whose heartbeat? At this moment, what I have heretofore read as an incestuous mother/son union becomes a sibling rivalry between brothers, “frères implacables” (l. 16) locked in an eternal battle. In this poem, Baudelaire plays with the two traditional notions of doubling outlined by Eric Gans. The first type of double reflects the romantic narcissistic re/version of the Hebraic double, as it pretends no longer to see in itself the reflection of the other (man in God’s image/son in mother’s), but sees in the other a reflection of itself (“Mon semblable, mon frère,” 1984). This allows union with the other for completion. This vision shifts to the Greek model, which posits the double as a rival and engenders a battle for the identity, for the assignment of roles to decide who will be the subject and who the object.

The poet-hero resolves this battle to a degree through the increasing objectification of the female figure throughout the *recueil*. His self-confidence often wavers as his fantasized means of escape from the real demonstrates her own reality, her own subjectivity. This can be seen in The Cycle of the White Venus. These poems sent to Mme Sabatier allow a certain *mise-en-abîme* of the subjective confusion occurring in “L’homme et la mer.” The reader is engaged in the text as a character by the address “Au lecteur.” Unlike the imagined reader of that initial poem, this group bore a real dedicatee. This “original” reader, Mme Sabatier, to whom the poems were first sent, also appears as the imagined woman who inspired them. She is, then, the subject of the poems. The reader assumes the burden of confusion harrowing the poet-hero himself. As “mon

semblable, mon frère," this reader might identify with the poet-hero. Yet, as the mistress-muse also was meant to read them, the reader may be identified with her. In that case, the reader finds him- or herself doubly implicated in the problematization of subjectivity inherent in these poems as both their reader and their subject.

This confusion deepens for the critical reader because of the debate over the sincerity of the poems. Critics and biographers (Mossop, Porché) seem to agree that Baudelaire did not feel that Mme Sabatier herself was the Ideal represented by her image in the poems. Mossop attributes a certain irony to the poet's "attempt at spiritual regeneration through a pure Platonic love" in his reading of this cycle (149). This attempt, ironic or not, contrasts with the spiritual degeneration evident in "The Cycle of the Black Venus," which it follows. In that cycle of poems presumably written about Jeanne Duval, the poet initially seeks escape through the other, seduced by her exoticism and his own need to assuage his ennui ("Parfum exotique," "La chevelure," "De profundis clamavi"). He subsequently experiences disgust at her physicality ("Tu mettrais l'univers...dans ta ruelle," "Une charogne"). Realizing that she is preying on his life ("Sed non satiata," "Le vampire"), he wavers between giving up his life to her ("Le Léthé" (1857), "Le possédé") and killing her ("Remords posthume"). Ultimately he kills only her physical aspect, because she keeps reappearing in his memory, in his verse, where she comes back the way he wants her to ("Le chat," "Le Balcon"). "Un fantôme" provides a transition between the two cycles of the Black and White Venuses. The poet appears as a sort of Dr. Frankenstein, who has killed the woman to bring her back as his ghostly muse. Alive she can do nothing for him, but dead, her phantom can provide the material for him to re-create, re-animate his Ideal, civilizing her, separating her from her physical nature with "Le cadre," then painting "Le portrait" in his eternal memory—eternalized in the final poem of the cycle "Je te donne ces vers afin que si mon nom/Aborde heureusement aux époques lointaines" (*Fleurs XXXIX*).

The Cycle of the White Venus begins with "Semper Eadem" (*Fleurs XL*) in which the poet once again seeks to escape the real through his new and improved Venus. This Venus can talk, in fact, her words begin the sonnet, as she asks him "'D'où vous vient...cette tristesse étrange...?'" (l. 1) The poet explains the source of his spleen to her, "Vivre est un mal" (l. 4), and quickly silences her, "taisez-

vous!" (l. 8) He is seduced by, yet hostile toward her laughter and gaiety. She must be silenced because her voice, proof of her subjectivity, interferes with his using her as an object of escape, as he prays her to "laissez mon cœur s'enivrer d'un mensonge,/Plonger dans vos beaux yeux comme dans un beau songe..." (l. 12-13). He tragically refuses her attempt to understand him, desiring only to plunge into the lie of his dreamed escape, through her objectification, from the possibility of health and happiness she offers.

In the second poem of the cycle, "Toute entière" (*Fleurs XLI*), a third player enters the field to address the poet, "Le Démon." Satan brings the poet back to the physical reality of the Venus, asking him to name the most seductive aspect of her body. But, he is unable to fetishize her, to break her down into her various parts (as he has done with the Black Venus). He claims that:

'...l'harmonie est trop exquise,
Qui gouverne tout son beau corps,
Pour que l'impuissante analyse
En note les nombreux accords.
'O métamorphose mystique
De tous mes sens fondus en un!...' (l. 19-22)

Through the metamorphosis operated by the poet's verse, her body becomes disembodied, it becomes a harmony, a perfume, a moment—recalling the instance of restored semiotic plenitude in "La vie antérieure"—in which the poet can feel, ecstatically, the unification of his desire, and thus his subjectivity. Satan represents, in a sense, the father tempting the son, trying to "[l]e prendre en faute" (l. 3), to convince him to perceive the mother's castration, to view the "objets noirs ou roses" (l. 7) that would reveal her difference. The poet's option for unity, his refusal to try the "impuissante analyse," signals his refusal to accept the castration this fetishization would also mark for himself.

The third poem of the cycle, *Fleurs XLII*, comprises another dialogue, this one between the poet and his own soul. He has progressively turned inward, moving from his dialogue with the real woman outside in "Semper Eadem," to his discussion with an external spirit in "Tout entière," he now addresses only his imagination. Once the image of the woman has been completely divorced from any physical reality and her castration has been denied, the poet finds the possibility of happiness, singing the praises of his maternal "Ange gardien, la Muse et la Madone." In a curious self-

splitting, demonstrating his schizophrenic view of the world, which constantly refers to the mind/body split, the poet asks his “âme solitaire,” his “coeur autrefois flétri,” what it will say to the new beauty “Dont le regard divin t'a soudain refleuri?” The reflowering of the heart shrivels by its experience with the corrupt, physical Black Venus. This reflowering is possible because the poet has become able, for a time, to separate the Muse from her corporeality, referring to her “chair spirituelle,” seeing only her “fantôme” coming to speak to him, to order him to love only the “Beau.” But more importantly, it comes from the new reflection of himself the poet sees in a new admirer. While the rejection of the Black Venus rendered him spiritually impotent, shattered his self-concept, the new muse restores his vigor as he becomes the object of her gaze.

The importance of the regard, the least corporeal, most spiritual of an other’s aspect, becomes clearer in the next poem in the sequence, “Le flambeau vivant.” While in the preceding poem the Muse’s regard re-awakened the poet’s hope, here it becomes the guiding force of his existence. Further distanced from the body, the Muse guides him as a disembodied pair of eyes. They erase all of the threatening sexual difference that marked the Black Venus who could consume the universe with her *vagina dentata* (*Fleurs* XXV). These phallicized eyes become “frères” to the poet, and can save him from “tout piège et de tout péché grave” (l. 5), leading him toward the Ideal. Hope is so strong for the poet that he believes the possibility of a *réveil* from the death his soul felt before.

This vein of hope continues in the following poem of the 1861 edition, “Réversibilité” (*Fleurs* XLIV), in which the poet demonstrates that he has not yet sunk to the depths he later will in “L’Irrémédiable.” Praying to the “Ange” full of gaiety, goodness, health, beauty and happiness, he feels that he may yet be saved. But this poem loses much of its impact in the 1861 edition because of the banning of “A celle qui est trop gaie” (Pléaide 156-57), which directly preceded it in 1857. The banned poem represents one of Baudelaire’s most vicious and violent expressions of need for and hatred of the other, of the woman.

The first four stanzas demonstrate the aspects of health and gaiety of the White Venus, which simply blow away any “passant chagrin” she might feel. Her carelessness is so extreme that she appears insane: “Folle dont je suis affolé” (l. 15), but this carelessness drives the poet crazy: “Je te hais autant que je t’aime!” (l. 16)

Humiliated, he parallels her cheer to the beauty of nature—the shining sun, “le printemps et la verdure” (l. 21)—taking it as a personal reproach, an insult to his own sulkiness, *atonie*, which in his egocentric fantasy he feels should be reflected in all around him. What he describes as “L’insolence de la Nature” (l. 24) threatens his narcissistic ego and metaphorically rapes him, as it tears his breast and humiliates him (l. 20-22). Now, since he cannot take on the cheery mood of his mistress who expresses her subjective difference from his own, he wishes to punish her and force her to take on his evil humor. Taking the last three stanzas to an extreme reading, the poet fantasizes the ultimate rape in which he castrates his victim as he carves “Une blessure large et creuse” (l. 32). Then he metaphorically penetrates every orifice, as this new one in her “flanc étonné” (l. 31) represents anus and both oral and vaginal lips, and passes on his spleen, as he would a syphilitic infection, carving a new orifice into her flank, and dreaming:

Et, vertigineuse douceur!
A travers ces lèvres nouvelles,
Plus éclatantes et plus belles,
T’infuser mon venin, ma sœur! (l. 33-36)

The parallel between “Au lecteur”’s “mon semblable, mon frère” cannot go unnoticed. This moment reflects the same hate and violence for “La Présidente,” that the earlier poem did for his complacent, bourgeois reader. This hatred arises equally from the poet’s exclusion from happiness, from the threat their happiness seems to pose to his own subjectivity, as from his need to feel a community, a familiarity, to feel that he has brothers and sisters, that he is not alone, not an Outsider.

“Réversibilité” (*Fleurs XLIV*) refers to the changing mood of the poet-hero, and allows an almost incredible return of hope for him after the violence of “À celle qui est trop gaie.” Reaching out in an act of reconciliation and a plea for the understanding he first rejected in “Semper Eadem” and feeling himself denied in the previous poem, the poet asks this “Ange plein de gaité” (l. 1) if she, so full of health and beauty, ever knows the fevers, anguish and hate that he feels. He asks her to pray for him, hoping for a possible remittance from his suffering. His prayer is followed by a “Confession” (*Fleurs XLV*), a confession not of his own sins, but of hers; her imperfection provides the answer to his prayer. The poet recalls a single evening stroll with the “aimable et douce femme” (l. 1) who

finally utters “une note bizarre,” a note that resembles the shame of an unwanted child—a monstrous child like the poet himself in “Bénédiction,” a child which represents the sin she is about to confess:

Comme une enfant chétive, horrible, sombre, immonde,
Dont sa famille rougirait,
Et qu’elle aurait longtemps, pour la cacher au monde,
Dans un caveau mise au secret (l. 21-24).

She speaks, admitting her shameful truth, “cette confidence horrible”: “Que c’est un dur métier que d’être belle femme...” (l. 29).

Making a living from her physical beauty, she confesses her own prostitution. This, however, reassures the poet: even she “who is too gay” has troubles, imperfections. The poet gains the sympathy and understanding he wishes, the spectacle he has drawn of her admission of sins has placated him, allowed him to view her as his semblable. “L’Aube spirituelle” (*Fleurs* XLVI) sustains this ray of hope for the poet-hero, as the sun/Son-like Muse/Savior appears “Pour l’homme terrassé qui rêve encore [en-corps] et souffre” (l. 6). The poem recounts the spiritual awakening of the poet, seduced or blinded, by the brightness of the Muse. He is “la brute assoupie,” for whom her “souvenir,” her “fantôme,” appear like the sun, blocking out “les débris fumeux des stupides orgies” (l. 9). He can forget the regrettable material aspect of his being in her spiritual light. However, the fallacy of this hope is foreshadowed here; in a slip the poet reveals that the “inaccessible azur” opening up for him as he sheds his materiality, beckons like the “gouffre” (l. 5, 7). The gaping hole of the abyss, of the seductive woman is revealed, if only for a moment, to cast its shadow over the poet’s fate, just as “le soleil a noirci la flamme des bougies” in line 12.

“Harmonie du soir” (*Fleurs* XLVII) reveals once again the illuminating power of the memory of the Muse. The poet describes the fading of the day as perceived by each of the senses: the scent of the flowers evaporates, the melancholy suffering of a violin floats to the ear as the setting sun reveals a vision of itself drowning in the pool of its own red blood. All of this overwhelming sensory input may evoke fear of the gouffre glimpsed in the previous sonnet, here seen as “néant vaste et noir” (l. 9), but for the poet the past, his memory of the Muse guide him: “Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor!” (l. 16) The beauty of this remembrance, however, becomes a bitter poison in “Le Flacon” (*Fleurs* XLVIII). Using the

flask as a double metaphor for both himself and the poem, the poet wishes the memory he leaves with others to linger like a vile poison, to remind those who read the verse of its force and virulence. Subjective confusion returns as this image of the poet feminizes and objectifies him, as he becomes a uterine flask, and the odor he leaves resembles the *odor di femina*. This scent, which might also be attributed to the Muse causes a voluptuous phallic "Vertige" (containing the *verge*), a vertigo, which is, although seductive, extremely dangerous. In his desire to please, the poet wishes to affect others as she has him, leaving them perched at the edge of this gouffre where he could lose his balance and finally fall into nothingness, death. The *néant* that the Woman-Muse represents and that he so desires also bears a frightening aspect.

The Cycle of the White Venus begins hopefully for the poet, as that escape from self-consciousness, from reality, from spleen seems possible in the creation of a Muse who evades the flesh, thus avoiding *le Mal* and achieving a positive Ideal. He can evoke a memory, a fantom woman, in which he can lose himself, "s'enivrer," without grave danger. Yet her perceived antipathy eventually angers him, and her subjectivity explodes his illusion of a real and permanent solution to his problems; no longer able to escape through her, he wishes to destroy her. For a moment he is able to resuscitate the illusion, to recreate her beautiful memory, but ultimately this memory becomes the poison held by "Le Flacon."

This cycle of poems demonstrates the Baudelairean poet-hero's flight from the real, the physical, the sexual (whose horror he recounted in The Cycle of the Black Venus), and shows his desire to create only on an imaginary, ideal plane. He gains increasing control of himself by silencing the other's subjectivity by taking away her body and her voice. This desexualized object, is soon left only with a powerful phallicized regard—operating a return to a time before differentiation, when mother and son were one, undivided by the father's revelation of sexual difference. As the Muse is broken down and transformed by the poet's imaginative power, she loses even that power to become a formless light which represents an ideal beyond, a "happy death," that seduces the poet, lulls him into a sense of security. But lying just beyond this dream of total fulfillment, as the poet soon senses, lies the black nothingness of the *gouffre*, the total absorption of his self, the menace of her ubiquitous

subjectivity, constantly returning, just when he thought he had annihilated it.

The Cycle of the Green-Eyed Venus begins with "Le poison" (*Fleurs XLIX*), which describes the contents of "Le Flacon" from a new perspective, and seems to be one of Baudelaire's clearest enunciations of the woman as the ultimate means of escape. Poison is one of the more interesting words in Baudelaire's arcana; it has connotations of both one meaning and its contrary, reflecting the ambivalence of the poet-hero's attraction to/repulsion from the woman: on the one hand, poison overtly evokes death, but its latin etymolygy *potio*, potion, evokes on the other hand, a cure for illness, life. Furthermore the magic potion can be one of transformation, and in this case the definite article emphasizes that it is not just any poison, but the poison.

Baudelaire teases the reader, though, saving the best for last, as he first describes two potions of lesser value: wine and opium. In the first stanza of the poem, wine is attributed the alchemical power to gild reality:

Le vin sait revêtir le plus sordide bouge
D'un luxe miraculeux,
Et fait surgir plus d'un portique fabuleux
Dans l'or de sa vapeur rouge,

Comme un soleil couchant dans un ciel nébuleux (l. 1-5)

It creates a state of "luxe" in the most sordid hovel, which harks back to that womb-like luxury of "La vie antérieure," where the image of the "portique" is seen. Having to do with fables or with the "merveilleux antique" according to the *Robert*, this "portique" is *fabuleux* and thus relates to a pre-rational time, the maternal imaginary. The wine opens the door onto the ancient marvel of the previous existence. Its alchemy gilds, but perhaps we can also divine the little alchemical homunculus floating around in "sa vapeur rouge," waiting to "surgir" at the moment of the "couchant" / "accouchement." While wine allows for the "centralisation du Moi" mentioned by Baudelaire at the beginning of "Mon cœur mis à nu," in contrast the opium of the second stanza of "Le poison" operates its "vaporisation." The boundaries of self are lost as the drug "agrandit ce qui n'a pas de bornes," filling the soul "au-delà de sa capacité" (l. 6, 10).

The reader discovers at the onset of the third stanza that the powers of these potions "ne vaut pas le poison qui découle/...de tes

yeux verts" (l. 11-12). The other's gaze contains the most powerful poison/potion, source of and cure for the poet's ills. These eyes are likened to "Lacs où mon âme tremble et se voit à l'envers..." (l. 13); just as in "L'homme et la mer," the poet sees himself reflected in the water, but he sees himself in reverse. In the woman's eyes, he sees his opposite (the woman herself), and he sees himself as opposite (himself feminized/as other). The poison then, is not just transforming, but also self-revealing. And it seems to reveal that the self is a sham, bringing us back to Lacan's mirror stage where the self is really constituted out of nothing but the desire reflected in the regard of the other.

The poet is transfixed in this gaze, seeing himself backwards (*à l'envers...*). Fortunately, his dreams come along to save him from this suspended moment: "Mes songes viennent en foule/Pour se désaltérer à ces gouffres amers" (l. 14-15). They come to drink the potion of transformation that will transform him back into himself, "le dés-altérer," figuratively fulfill his desire for union, make him un-other. And they will un-other him from none other than "ces gouffres à mères," (also present in "L'homme et la mer"), these mothers' wombs, these yawning chasms that separate him from the mother, from himself and from his desire. These "gouffres amers" correspond grammatically to the "yeux verts" of the mistress, from the "gouffre" of the womb as well as the gash of the female sex. In this equation of the eye with the sex, we realize that the poison drips not only from her eyes, but from her "gouffre." The fourth stanza permits a further extention as the "terrible prodige" of the poison becomes the woman's saliva, a bodily fluid excreted from the lips and by extension from her vaginal lips. If the poet were to taste this poison, one sees again through the image of cunnilingus, a reiterated attempt to return to the womb, to climb right back in head first.

The brilliance of this last stanza lies in its taking this cunnilingual image and turning it into an instance of fellatio, and finally into a possible instance of vaginal penetration. This complete confusion of sexual organs—reminiscent of the polymorphous perversity of the infant—brings us back to the confusion about the mirror image, this wondering "who is who? which one is the subject, which one is the image?"

Tout cela ne vaut pas le terrible prodige

De ta salive qui mord,

Qui plonge dans l'oubli mon âme sans remords,

Et, charriant le vertige,

La roule défaillante aux rives de la mort! (l. 16-20)

The woman's saliva bites (and is death: *mord=mort*). Are her lips these "rives de la mort," the mythical source of life and death? They seem to roll around the "ver[til]ge," which is also a *vert tige*, his phallic stem is of the same color as her eyes—the eye that can be both symbolically phallic or vaginal. In this total sexual union/confusion of bodies are figured and combined the effects of the wine and the opium together: the poet seemingly returns into the womb, and knows *la (petite) mort*, the death of orgasm at the same time. He experiences at once "la centralisation et la vaporisation du Moi." But there is one problem—the orgasm arrives too soon. The poem ends in an exclamation, a premature ejaculation on the shore, at the banks of death, never really breaking through to the other side.

In a sense, though, during sexual contact with the woman, the poet does operate the most valuable form of escape, for in the complete physical confusion of sexual organs and mental erasure of his sense of a distinct self, he operates an escape from the burden of self-consciousness. The next poem of the cycle demonstrates the transient nature of this type of escape. In "Ciel brouillé" (*Fleurs L*), however, the poet can no longer read what is in the eye of the woman. The poison allowing escape is not always there, he can no longer tell if these eyes are green, or blue, or grey. He cannot predict her mood any more than he can predict the weather. This manifestation of her subjectivity, of the changing nature of her desire, profoundly destabilizes him, causing him to question his own identity, his own desire, and his own potency: "saurai-je tirer de l'implacable hiver/ Des plaisirs plus aigus...?" (l. 15-16)

The doubling effect of the mirror seen in "L'homme et la mer" and "Le poison," becomes an internal doubling, or haunting in "Le chat" (*Fleurs LI*). While in the first two poems the mother is linked to the double, the question of the ghost of the father also arises in this poem. The cat walking around in the poet's head manifests itself as a feminine voice, and is, in effect, a sort of muse filling up the poet with/like a good poem "Me remplit comme un vers nombreux" (l. 11-12). He enjoys this sensation as he would a "philtre," returning to the trope of the poison. Because this cat is, in fact, often read as an internalized representation of the mistress,

one can say that, once again, the woman operates as vehicle of escape.

The voice of the Muse, so important in "Confession," provides the poet a means of escape through the cat's purr: "Elle endort les plus cruels maux/Et contient toutes les extases" (l. 13-14). He has a purely intuitive understanding of it: "Pour dire les plus longues phrases,/Elle n'a pas besoin de mots" (l. 15-16). In fact this cat's voice seems like Cixous's depiction of the voice of the mother which expresses the non-symbolic, pre-linguistic communications of plenitude allowed in the imaginary and longed for in the theory of the Correspondances. The poet explains the pleasure this voice causes him:

Non, il n'est pas d'archet qui morde
Sur mon cœur, parfait instrument,
Et fasse plus royalement
Chanter sa plus vibrante corde (l. 17-20)

The voice of the cat becomes the bow that pulls at the poet's heartstrings, in fact the voice of the cat makes the poet purr. Here we see an internal doubling. The poet no longer sees himself reflected in the mother's eyes, but now the mother's voice seems to sing through him in an angelic and harmonious manner that needs no words in this instance of perception of the maternal imaginary. This would be totally harmonious, being beyond the linguistic, beyond the frustrating incapacities of signification, and would avoid the gap—the "manque de communication"—necessary between signifier and signified. This conception of language is reflected in the idea of the Correspondance, a desire to conceive of Nature without these gaps, and reflects the frustrating nature of the lack felt by the subject at its separation from the mother.

The second part of the poem problematizes this reading as it allows both an equation of the cat with the mother and with the ghost of the father. In *Fusées XII*, Baudelaire discusses the connection between his taste in women and his mother's furs and the smell of furs in general. The first stanza of the second part of "Le chat" brings this connection to bear:

De sa fourrure blonde et brune
Sort un parfum si doux, qu'un soir
J'en fus embaumé, pour l'avoir
Caressée une fois, rien qu'une (l. 25-28).

The poet strokes the mistress's sex (or masturbates an internalized female sex)—*une chatte* in slang terms—and from the fur/pubic hair (both *poils*) arises the *odor di femina*. This odor embalms him—turns him into a *momie*, which is both his "sosie"⁵ and his mommy; as he is the "mummy" of his "mommy." He has allowed himself to (re)produce her, and to produce in her the premature orgasm with a single caress which inverts the necessities of sexual reproduction and yet maintains its perpetuation of self beyond death.

But in the real-life Baudelaire family drama, the one who is dead is the father. And in the next stanza one discovers that this male cat, mimicking a female sex and the voice of the mother, also appears as the ghost of the father:

C'est l'esprit familier du lieu;
 Il juge, il préside, il inspire
 Toutes choses dans son empire;
 Peut-être est-il fée, est-il dieu? (l. 29-32)

This familiar spirit still reigns over his empire like the ghost of Hamlet's father. He holds the keys to the law, judging. God-like he inspires, but this spirit is also "fée" and therefore feminine. One can read this poem as a description by the poet of the bisexual nature (in the sense of *anima/animus*) of his personality and more importantly, of the bisexual nature of the superego, in which both the voice of the mother and the law of the father have been internalized. "Le chat," one of the most positive poems of the *Fleurs du mal*, allows the poet to express love in many ways. Literally, while he loves the cat about which he is writing, he also can be seen as loving the mistress which the cat can symbolize. Internally, he loves the mother/father superego represented by the cat and, even more, it seems to also represent an Ideal ego, internally reflecting back to the poet that which he loves in himself: "ce chat que j'aime.../Et que je regarde en moi-même..." (l. 33, 36). This astonishes him as it fixedly returns his stare.

The next poem in this cycle, "Le beau navire" (*Fleurs LII*), clearly demonstrates the privileged position of the woman as evasion, as she becomes the physical means of escape, the ship. The ship as a vessel, a container and a carrier, provides a metaphor for the pregnant, or nursing mother. She passively receives the poet-hero's *vers*: his verse and his sperm-worms. But the poet also seems to be carried off on a voyage by the ship; he enters it becoming the child, the fruit of his own loins, and his own verse. He is both the

creator of the verse and the verse itself. As he creates himself, he writes his sense of his self in the poem. He is both father and son, his poetic creation and the fruit of the fantasized incestuous union with the virgin mother (both sea and ship). He is both himself and his descendence, his legacy to the future.

The poem begins "Je veux te raconter...." The poet's desire is to tell or to re-tell, the woman. He will take her power to give birth to him and he will give poetic birth to her by painting her beauty. He will do this in an incestuous move "Où l'enfance s'allie à la maturité" (l. 4). In the represented woman, the child and the adult will "come" together. He, as a mature man, can fantasize the incestuous union he desired as a child while the still youthful woman replaces the maturity of the old mother. The poet describes how her body is like a ship, swaying, reflecting the ship's rocking ("bercement") on the sea and of the child in the mother's arms. This swaying has "l'effet d'un beau vaisseau" (l. 6), turning her into a passive vessel to receive the poet's words. Repeating itself from verse to verse, the poem itself sways back and forth from the hips to the breasts, only to return to the hips of the woman. Her breast, also a vaginal chasm, "gorge," provides the site of polymorphous pleasure filled with those potions, with which the reader is already familiar, an "armoire à doux secrets.../De vins, de parfums, de liqueurs.../Qui feraient délivrer..." (l. 22-24). Her legs torment his desire "comme deux sorcières qui font/Tourner un philtre noir dans un vase profond" (l. 31-32). Thus the woman's body with its milky potions acts as repository for the poet's escape from the tension, his spleen of dissatisfaction. The satisfactions in question are both infantile and sexual, oral and genital, as the focus shifts back and forth from the breast to the vagina. As the poet is both child and father, the woman is both mother and child, "majestueuse enfant" (l. 40). She becomes his child in the retelling of her that is the poem.

"L'invitation au voyage" (*Fleurs LIII*) continues this writing of the woman's body, which becomes a writing off of it, by means of which the poet can co-opt the woman's/mother's (re)productive power. He invites the fruit of the incestuous union of mother and son of "Le beau navire" on the voyage: "Mon enfant, ma sœur..." (l. 1). The obsession with incestuous generation continues as the poet wishes to live with, and love his child/sister. This trip would bring them, siblings, back to a state of union with the mother, as

they would return to the “pays qui te ressemble!” (l. 6) With the female sister, the male poet finds an even closer identity to the mother. Only she can truly resemble the mother, as only she has the womb. This “pays” that looks like her resembles the images of the womb already outlined, the site of “*Luxe, calme et volupté.*”

In this womb the voice of the mother reappears, like “*Le chat*” who spoke without words; all objects would communicate: “*Tout y parleraient/A l’âme en secret/Sa douce langue natale*” (l. 24-26). In this mother country, one would speak one’s mother tongue, escaping the unfulfilling, frustrating condition of separation, of signification, where apart from the mother, both subjectivity and language can only be figured as lack. Both the vessel and the destination of the voyage are the mother’s womb. But this trip is doomed and the poet expresses his realization of this in the next poem of the cycle, “*L’Irréparable*” (*Fleurs* LIV).

The hope to recapture the lost paradise is stopped short by the sense of the irreparability of the fall, be it the sin of the mother or the birth of the son that is the result. In any case, the depth of the sense of loss lies in the force of the burden of remorse: “*Pouvons-nous étouffer le vieux, le long Remords...*” (l. 1). This remorse is a result of life, a fact of life, for as we live in time, time constantly passes. Through poetry, the poet has sought escape, but escape is only temporary. He has only been buying time. While remorse eats away at him like “*le ver des morts*” (l. 3), his own *vers* seem dead: neither his verse, nor his impotent sperm have been able to operate the permanent solution he seeks. He doesn’t want merely to escape, but to use a poison—“*philtre*” “*vin*” “*tisane*” (l. 10) for true liberation. He asks a woman, the “*belle sorcière*” (l. 11), to tell him the secret potion. She, as Insider, knows the secret to life and death. She can and does reproduce herself, she triumphs through her progeny.

He, however, has lost all hope, “*L’Espérance qui brille aux carreaux de l’Auberge/Est soufflée, est morte à jamais!*” (l. 26-27) His soul—his replacement womb—is completely barren, incapable of any joy, of any of the jouissance leading to production. His heart represents the “*théâtre banal*” (l. 45), the barren womb, where no spectacle of value is produced. He waits and waits, for a sort of assumption to occur, where he, like the Virgin Mary, will be visited by “*l’extase*,” where the “*Être aux ailes de gaze*” (l. 50) will descend to fecundate him and produce the savior of the world. “*L’Irréparable*” expresses the depths of artistic frustration at the

incapacity to create, at the ultimate condition of the incapacity of the artist to re/create himself or to really signify himself or anything because of the flawed nature of linguistic structure. As the poet/child realizes he can not cover over the abyss that yawns between himself and the mother from whom he has been separated, the inadequacy of language reveals itself. For this same abyss gapes between the signifier and the signified, between the poem and the object of its art (the woman he wishes to describe as the Ideal of beauty), and finally between the reader and the poet. For ultimately the poet can not signify himself in the way he wishes the reader to see him signified.

For Baudelaire's protagonist, the reader resembles the mother. Just as the infant wishes to see himself loved in the eyes of the all-need-fulfilling mother, the poet wishes to recapture this paradise, not only in the fantasy of the poem, but also on a tangible level through the poem. The poem is not a gift, but a demand, a demand for the fulfillment of the need to be loved. The poet wishes to see himself as loved in the mirror of the eyes of his public, who approve his alchemy, who in fact are necessary to the achievement of his alchemy, by literally turning his verse into the gold of real, material success. The irreparable distance between the writer and the reader becomes fixed and concretized as Baudelairean spleen, fueled by perversity, working to take control of the situation of solitude and turning it into an active isolation, as he insulates himself from the hostile and rejecting, because not totally and completely loving, mother/world.

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Notes

1. This is something which we may observe in the prose poem "Le confiteor de l'artiste" (*Spleen de Paris III*), in which an excess of stimulus achieved through communion with nature results in the poet's near-breakdown.

2. I owe this phrase to Professor Peter Robinson (personal communication 1/29/92).

3. This numerotation follows the Pléaide edition cited in the list at the end of the article, and all subsequent citations of line numbers correspond to those assigned in that edition.

4. An image Baudelaire explores with the parthenogenetic Phoenix in "Les sept vieillards" (*Fleurs XC*).
5. Blanchot brings out the connection *momie/sosie* in *Thomas l'obscur*.

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Desiring Venus

Laura Leavitt

Mario Praz has noted that the romanticism of the first half of the nineteenth century is marked by the figure of the "Fatal Man," which in the second half of the century is replaced by the figure of the "Fatal Woman."¹ In the first instance the hero has a deadly effect on his leading lady; in the second he is killed by her. Praz further writes that:

literature, even in its most artificial forms, reflects to some extent aspects of contemporary life. It is curious to follow the parabola of the sexes during the nineteenth century: the obsession for the androgynous type towards the end of the century is a clear indication of a turbid confusion of function and ideal. The male, who at first tends towards sadism, inclines, at the end of the century, towards masochism. (Praz 216)

Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus*,² belonging as it does to the fin-de-siècle period of decadence, fits into this "Fatal Woman" schema, since the female protagonist is ultimately responsible for the death of her male lover. However, the sex roles of the two main characters are complicated by a blurring of gender roles which the terms "Fatal Man" and "Fatal Woman" do not adequately address. The first such blurring regards the author herself, since Praz's configuration presupposes a male-authored narrative.³

Like Praz, Maurice Barrès is also interested in the relation of literature to real life. In his preface to *Monsieur Vénus*, Barrès calls our attention—albeit naively—to the question of the author's gender. His first line is telling: "Ce livre-ci est assez abominable, pourtant je ne puis dire qu'il me choque" (Barrès 5). If indeed the book is so "abominable," why then is it not shocking? Or if it is not shocking, then why is it "abominable"? Barrès reveals the cause of his trouble in due time: "Ce qui est tout à fait délicat dans la perversité de ce livre, c'est qu'il a été écrit par une jeune fille de vingt ans" (Barrès 5-6). In other words, what disturbs M. Barrès is not the novel itself—the words on the page (the "abominable" language)—but the fact that they were written by a "young girl." Rachilde seems to have intruded upon territory where she does not belong,

could not belong: "Ce vice savant éclatant dans le rêve d'une vierge, c'est un des problèmes les plus mystérieux que je sache, mystérieux comme le crime, le génie ou la folie d'un enfant, et tenant de tous les trois" (Barrès 6, emphasis added). This "vice savant" is for Barrès a euphemism for the written expression of sexual knowledge. Rachilde has crossed the line of seemliness for a young female writer.

This transgression highlights a contradiction in Victorian attitudes about women. On the one hand, women (especially virgins) are kept away from "vice": it is not their domain, they are not (must not be) its authors and should not know of, talk or write about it. On the other, the Bible implies that women are the very inventors of evil (Eve-il). Foucault's examination of Victorian sexual mores elaborates this double standard. For example, consensus dictated that children were asexual beings. But at the same time these young people—who were supposedly naturally uninterested in sex—were actively forbidden from hearing or speaking of it or otherwise coming into contact with it. This prohibition demonstrates a hidden awareness and fear of children's sexuality which accounts for the need to deny and repress it. Foucault argues that children were not the only people whose sexuality was repressed by Victorian society; in fact no one outside the marital bond had any legitimate access to it.⁴ Into this Foucauldian contradiction—in which one is assumed simultaneously to know and not to know (or speak)—where can we place Rachilde? Or should we attempt to place her within the contradiction at all? Is the point, perhaps, precisely that this is *not her place*? It is evident, in any case, that Rachilde as author is aware of the problem. As the doctor says of the young heroine early in the novel, "[e]lle ne connaît pas le vice, mais elle l'invente!" (Rachilde 41) Rachilde seems to be playing a joke on those readers who would underestimate her sexual knowledge (read: authority).

As interested as he is in the gender of the novelist, Barrès does not pursue this question with regards to the novel itself, except to say that it portrays "une des plus singulières déformations de l'amour qu'ait pu produire la maladie du siècle dans l'âme d'une jeune femme" (Barrès 14). One must question Barrès's assessment of the novel.⁵ Here we have a story in which a wealthy and powerful woman (Raoule de Vénérande) keeps a beautiful but miserably poor male artist (Jacques Silvert) as her lover/sex object, becomes terribly possessive of him, punishes him for his real or imagined

betrayals, is instrumental in his death, and worships his effigy in a gesture which possibly represents regret, contentment or even sexual satisfaction. At least in a preliminary reading we can ask what, if anything, is "deformed" about the "love" in this novel, what is indeed unusual, aside from the reversal of traditional sex roles. Rachilde's novel is surely an arrow slung in the face of a society in which "*une vraie jeune fille*" does not speak of these things. But Rachilde goes beyond a mere role reversal, putting the question of gender front and center with continual references to Jacques's femininity and to Raoule's masculinity, the most basic of which is the heroine's name.

Let us begin with the equation Eve=evil. In the novel's opening scene, the heroine is presented groping around in the dark along the walls of an unlit corridor for the door which, unbeknownst to her, will open onto her erotic adventure. Expecting to find a woman who makes silk flowers, Mlle de Vénérande fails to read the ironic error of the sign (in both senses of the word) on the door, marked: "*Marie Silvert, fleuriste, dessinateur*" (Rachilde 23, emphasis added). Instead, she blindly and still innocently enters the apartment. The first thing she encounters, before her eyes have even focused on her surroundings, is the overwhelming and disgusting odor of cooking apples. These apples, frying odiously in the "*atmosphère empuantie*" of this tumbledown attic, are the decadent version of the first apple of the Garden of Eden. However in this case they are not first associated with Eve (the woman, Raoule) but with Adam (the man, Jacques), since they are part of his physical and sensual space. Rachilde mentions these apples five times in the short first chapter, at the end of which the heroine no longer finds their odor "insupportable." Instead, "*Mlle de Vénérande s'imagina qu'elle mangerait peut-être bien une de ces pommes sans trop de révolte*" (Rachilde 28). Can we then say that Rachilde would have Adam give the apple to Eve? Let us examine this scene further.

The sign of gender confusion on the door is replaced by the thing itself as the heroine penetrates the attic apartment along with the cold air. A man is sitting at the table with his back to the door, Raoule and the reader. Seen for the first time from behind, the man is thus presented as object of the gaze, and not as subject which is his "*rightful*" masculine position.⁶ Our heroine, who has just entered a new world, is confused (as is the reader) by the gender of the man who was expected to be a woman:

—Est-ce que je me trompe, monsieur? interrogea la visiteuse, désagréablement impressionnée; Marie Silvert, je vous prie.

—C'est bien ici, madame, et, pour le moment, Marie Silvert, c'est moi (Rachilde 24).

It is here, in apposition to Jacques's mis-identity as Marie, that we first learn of the heroine's feminized masculine first name, Raoule. Jacques's real name is not admitted to the reader until well into the chapter, and Raoule does not learn it until after her first visit. The narration is in the third-person from the point of view of Raoule. She is clearly the observer (the subject) in this scene, and what she observes is the body, voluptuously described, of the man (the object).

The development by which Raoule comes to accept the apple(s) is tied to the awakening of her sexual desire, provoked by the sight of the partially nude male. The vision of Jacques's golden chest hair, perceived through his open blouse, is irresistible to the visitor, who is compelled by her own desire to touch him:

Une douleur sourde traversa la nuque de Mlle de Vénérande. Ses nerfs se surexcitaient dans l'atmosphère empuantie de la mansarde. Une sorte de vertige l'attirait vers ce nu. Elle voulut faire un pas en arrière, s'arracher à l'obsession, fuir... Une sensualité folle l'étreignit au poignet... Son bras se détendit, elle passa la main sur la poitrine de l'ouvrier, comme elle l'eût passée sur une tête blonde, un monstre dont la réalité ne lui semblait pas prouvée (Rachilde 31).

Raoule is not described physically in the first chapter; we know not whether her blouse is slightly open, her skin like that of a newborn or her chest hair golden. In a reversal of traditional gender roles, Raoule is the subject of this gaze, Jacques is the object. It is Raoule's *desire* that the author emphasizes, not her body. Actively taking up her desire, Raoule also takes up the dominant power position as holder of the gaze. Rachilde has switched the characters' gender roles and thus the power structure of the entire novel. Perhaps, then, Rachilde has not retold the biblical story in reverse, with Adam giving Eve the apple. Instead, she has reassigned their roles, leaving the structure of the tale intact: Eve/Jacques has given the apple to Adam/Raoule. Simultaneously, and in accordance with

the myth, Adam/Raoule leaves her life of innocence before the fall, symbolized by the dark hallway, and bites from the tree of knowledge as she enters the lighted space of “female” perversion, that of Eve/Jacques. Since it is her own sexual desire that makes her vulnerable to such a fall, let us look to other critics in an attempt to characterize the female desire in this novel.

In *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* René Girard traces through Western (mostly male) literature, from Cervantes through the 20th century, an elaborate and ingenious structure of romantic and romanesque desire.⁷ In Girard’s view, the “romantic lie” consists in the romantic hero’s naive conception of spontaneous desire. The romantic hero believes that the source of his desire rests in himself or in the desired object: “Désirer à partir de l’objet équivaut à désirer à partir de soi-même” (Girard 30). Quite to the contrary, argues Girard, all desire is mediated by a third party; the hero’s (subject’s) desire is always an imitation of the mediator’s (perceived or imagined) desire for the object in question. The triumph of the “roman-esque” author rests in the fact that he—in Girard’s model the authors are male—recognizes the triangular structure of all desire and consciously displays this structure in his text.

Girard’s analysis is fascinating and useful, but also quite problematic for a feminist reader. For example, he shows that not only is all “honest” desire triangular, but that in fact desire cannot occur without another desire to serve as its model. Thus, when the mediator ceases to desire the object, the object is no longer appealing to the subject. Girard’s story is the subject’s story, the story of the romantic hero, and not that of the “object,” which in his system is the woman. To understand her place in this triangle, it may be helpful to turn to Luce Irigaray. In her essay, “Women on the Market,” Irigaray argues that capitalist society “is based on the exchange of women.”⁸ This exchange is what permits us to escape the disorder that would ensue if the incest taboo were disregarded. However, as a result of this exchange, the woman is perceived by the male subject as having no value of her own, except exchange or market value. As anyone familiar with the laws of supply and demand surely knows, an object (a product) gains in value only when it is in demand. Although, unlike Girard, Irigaray emphasizes the woman’s role in this system of exchange, she makes a similar argument to his. In Irigaray’s view, the value of an object of

exchange (in this case woman) is not intrinsic, but instead depends on the relationship of the exchangers:

The exchange value of two signs, two commodities, two women, is a representation of the needs/desires of consumer-exchanger subjects: in no way is it the "property" of the signs/articles/women themselves. At the most, the commodities—or rather the relationships among them—are the material alibi for the desire for relations among men (Irigaray 180).

As does Girard, Irigaray puts the emphasis on the mediated aspect of the relationship. In both cases the object appears to be an accessory to the more important relationship between the subject and the mediator. Girard is of course aware of this phenomenon of woman as object of exchange, although he never specifically analyzes her position, describing her simply as the "*objet désiré*".⁹

Girard's analysis is nevertheless relevant to our discussion for several reasons. One of the properties of triangular desire is that it is contagious. That is, once the subject perceives the mediator's desire for the object, the subject mimics this desire and in so doing becomes himself a mediator for the original mediator, who in turn mimics this copy of his own (perceived or imagined) desire. This mutual contagion will continue back and forth, with the subject and mediator becoming rivals for the desired object (Girard 118-19).

Mediation also occurs in the sexual domain when just two parties are involved. In this case, the desired object becomes the mediator for her own body. Perceiving the subject's desire for her, she overvalorizes her body, begins to desire it herself, and refuses to cede it to the subject, which in turn only augments the subject's desire.¹⁰ The problem is that in order to assure himself of the other's desire, simultaneously remaining in a position of power, and to prevent the mediator/rival from winning the desired object, the subject must dissimulate his own desire and wear a mask of indifference.¹¹ This holds true for the original subject as well as for the mediator/rival, even when the latter is the same person as the original object.¹² Here Girard makes a point that can be summed up adequately with the familiar notion that one always wants what one can't have; conversely, in order to make oneself more attractive to the object of one's desire, one must feign indifference, play "hard-to-get." But is this really all that's at work here, especially on

the part of the female “object”? On the one hand, Girard identifies the subject as masculine and the object as feminine without questioning such an assignment of gender roles or its implications. On the other, whenever a woman becomes a subject in a given text—often only as a mediator/rival for her own body—Girard likewise ignores the question of *différence*, of a possible distinction between her desire and that of the male subject. Specifically, Girard does not question the potential difference in the nature of the dissimulation of a woman’s desire versus that of a man.

To understand more fully the notion of dissimulation, or the mask, which upon examination leads to the larger issue of masquerade, let us turn to Joan Riviere. In her 1929 paper entitled “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” Riviere concentrates on “intermediate types” of women, those who fall between the poles of heterosexuality and homosexuality. More specifically, Riviere’s primary concern is the “intellectual” woman and her relation to “femininity.”¹³ While she says that the traditional view of intellect as a masculine attribute is falling into decline, Riviere does not reject the terms of this equation.¹⁴

Riviere uses as her primary object of study the example of an American woman whose career involves writing and speaking to large groups of men. The woman performs this (masculine) intellectual work very professionally, but when it is over she behaves toward the men in a flirtatious and coquettish manner. It is the incongruity between these two types of behavior that Riviere finds “problematic” and which triggers her analysis.

In Riviere’s psychoanalytic view, the patient adopts this coquettish behavior in what Riviere calls a “masquerade of womanliness.” This masquerade is an attempt to cover up or deny the assumption of “masculinity” (intellect) which is a sign of the woman’s having castrated her (The) father and appropriated the phallus. It is further an attempt to avert retribution (and anxiety stemming from fear of retribution) of the father for this castration. Riviere makes no distinction between the terms “womanliness” and “femininity”; indeed, both are screens behind which the woman can masquerade “as guiltless and innocent,” in a “compulsive reversal of her intellectual performance” (Riviere 38). Riviere provocatively states that genuine womanliness and its masquerade are one and the same thing, and then leaves the reader to wonder what could be behind the mask. As Stephen Heath points out in his

reading of Riviere, "to be a woman is to dissimulate a fundamental masculinity, feminity [sic] is that dissimulation" (Heath 49). In this masking process, enacted "for the man," "the identity of the woman—the assumption of 'the woman'—slips" (Heath 50).

How can Riviere's analysis of dissimulation be coordinated with René Girard's model of desire in a way that enlightens our reading of *Monsieur Vénus*? Girard, while focusing on the structure and duplicitous nature of desire in the novel, has not broached the question of the specificity of women's desire within that structure. Joan Riviere addresses the issue of woman's duplicitousness, without relating it to her desire, other than as a "negative" desire to avoid retribution for her "masculinity." Further, the very notion of "woman" slides out of her grasp and in its place remains nothing but a mask, an illusion.

In order for the reader to apply Riviere's psychoanalytic structure to *Monsieur Vénus*, Raoule would first have to exhibit signs of "masculine" behavior, which she clearly does throughout the entire novel, as witnessed by her transvestism, for example. Secondly, she would have to express her feelings of guilt, by means of a "masquerade of womanliness," for having assumed the masculine role. However, in the couple of brief sequences in which Raoule does consciously adopt this false cloak, it is accompanied by irony rather than guilt. For example, in one scene, she stands up her official lover, Raittolbe, in order to have sex with Jacques. The next day, when Raittolbe expresses his dismay at having been abandoned, Raoule simply replies: "—Rien ne doit vous étonner, puisque je suis une femme.... Je fais tout le contraire de ce que j'ai promis. Quoi de plus *naturel*?" (Rachilde 81, emphasis added) Words like these strike the reader less as an admission of guilt than as a conscious laying bare of a power structure based on hypocrisy and lies. Raoule is in effect saying: you desire me, therefore you would have me be a woman, but your idea of Woman does not include what I am, so the joke's on you. The punch line is that she uses what she considers to be Raittolbe's idea of femininity (the lying woman) against him in their battle of wills. Raoule assumes that Raittolbe is not in love with her "real" self, but with his own idea of her; therefore she exploits every opportunity to undermine this idea. Perhaps Raoule's femininity is less well explained by Riviere than by Irigaray, who juxtaposes what she calls a "masquerade of femininity" with "mimicry." The former is a mask behind which

women must hide in order to assure their value on the (sexual) exchange market (Irigaray 84). Conversely, the latter is a deliberate assumption of the feminine role in order “to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. . . To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it” (Irigaray 76).

Another effect of Raittolbe’s being kept waiting is that he, in addition to Jacques, must play the “woman” (object) to Raoule’s “man.” Roland Barthes argues that feminine and masculine are effects of roles, such that, for example, the one who waits loves, and the one who loves is feminized. Defining the absence of the lover, Barthes states that: “dans tout homme qui parle l’absence de l’autre, *du féminin* se déclare: cet homme qui attend et qui en souffre, est miraculeusement féminisé. Un homme n’est pas féminisé parce qu’il est inverti, mais parce qu’il est amoureux.”¹⁵

Raittolbe also suffers from Girard’s schema of triangular desire. His desire for Raoule grows ever more intense as he perceives that she is loved by another, even though this other, Jacques, is at first unaware of and then unconcerned by his rival. Raittolbe eventually resorts to revealing his desire to Raoule, combining it with an insinuated condemnation of Jacques’s perversion, in a final effort to wrest her away from his competition:

—Raoule, murmura doucement Raittolbe, si vous le vouliez bien, *nous pourrions échapper au gouffre*, vous, en ne revoyant plus Jacques, moi, en ne reparlant jamais à Marie. Une heure de folie n'est pas l'existence entière; unis par nos égarements, nous pourrions l'être aussi par notre réhabilitation; Raoule, croyez-moi, revenez à vous-même... vous êtes belle, *vous êtes femme*, vous êtes jeune. *Raoule, pour être heureuse suivant les lois de la Sainte nature*, il ne vous manque que de n'avoir jamais connu ce Jacques Silvert: oublions-le (Rachilde 158, emphasis added).

Unfortunately for Raittolbe, this attempt fails, as Girard would predict, for Raittolbe has disobeyed the first law of dissimulation in this frank revelation of his desire.

Continuing our examination from a Girardian point of view, we can see how Raittolbe, who at first seems truly uninterested and

even sickened by Raoule's attachment to a lowly effeminate artist, is drawn by Raoule into the web of desire in which he will ultimately play two roles. His first role is that of lover (subject) of Raoule (object) with Jacques as mediator. Later, however, he adopts the role of mediator/rival to Raoule's subjective love for Jacques. Raoule unwittingly points Raittolbe toward the second triangle by convincing him to distract Jacques's sister Marie from trying to upset the delicate balance of her unseemly affair with Jacques. To this end, Raittolbe seduces Marie, who in turn destroys his strategy by taking his advances seriously and falling in love with him (once again, female desire upsets the power (im)balance). But this contact with the Silvert household results in contact between the two men and, as the novel progresses, Raittolbe becomes uncomfortably aware of Jacques as sex object. This sexual awareness of another man throws Raittolbe's masculine self-image into doubt. In the following scene he has seized the opportunity of Raoule's absence to try to dissuade Jacques from marrying her. Raittolbe enters Jacques's bedroom and is astonished by the sight of Jacques's nudity, represented in the narrative as though seen through Raittolbe's eyes. He has an unfamiliar reaction:

Le baron de Raittolbe, debout devant cette couche en désordre, eut une étrange hallucination. L'ex-officier de hussards, le brave duelliste, le joyeux viveur, qui tenait en égale estime une jolie fille et une balle de l'ennemi, oscilla une demi-seconde: du bleu qu'il voyait autour de lui, il fit du rouge, ses moustaches se hérisserent, ses dents se serrèrent, un frisson suivi d'une sueur moite lui courut sur toute la peau. Il eut presque peur.

—Mille millions de tonnerres, grommela-t-il, si ce n'est pas Eros lui-même . . . (Rachilde 129).

Raittolbe's sexual appreciation of Jacques deepens as the novel progresses, to the point where he becomes an active player in a struggle with Raoule to possess him. It is as though having been thrust into the role of catalyst, Raittolbe cannot help but slip into that of mediator, until Raoule's desire for Jacques infects him as well. Toward the end of the novel there is a strong suggestion of a sexual liaison between the two men; at the very least Raittolbe appears to have bitten Jacques's neck. When Raittolbe has killed Jacques in the duel—upon which Raoule has insisted—his regret is

more than moral: "Ah! c'est une atrocité, je ne peux pas, *moi qui l'aime*, l'avoir tué! . . . Pendant qu'on allait chercher de l'eau, Raittolbe avait appuyé ses lèvres sur la blessure et tâchait d'attirer le sang qui coulait à peine" (Rachilde 222-23, emphasis added).

Raittolbe is not the only character who is pushed toward homosexuality (if not to say vampirism) by the weight of Raoule's desire. In a crucial moment Jacques returns to Marie's brothel (upon Raittolbe's urging) with the thought of betraying Raoule with one of the prostitutes, only to find that Raoule's transvestite "sex games" have ruined him for "real women": "pas une de ces filles, tu m'entends? pas une n'a pu faire revivre ce que tu as tué, sacrilège! . . ." (Rachilde 209). Indeed, Jacques becomes increasingly attached to Raoule's transvestism, to such an extent that if she removes her costume (mask) it upsets his sexual pleasure, and indeed the whole illusionary structure of desire that Raoule has created around him:

—Raoule, s'écria Jacques, la face convulsée, les dents crispées sur la lèvre, les bras étendus comme s'il venait d'être crucifié dans un spasme de plaisir,
Raoule tu n'es donc pas un homme? tu ne peux donc pas être un homme?

Et le sanglot des illusions détruites, pour toujours mortes, monta de ses flancs à sa gorge....

—*Non! non! n'ôte pas cet habit*, hurla-t-il, au paroxysme de la folie (Rachilde 198, emphasis added).

The problem is that the specificity of Raoule's desire seems to be obscured by the overwhelming effect of that desire on the men around her. Does Rachilde actually pursue the examination of this female desire? As we have already seen in the first chapter, she certainly presents it, but then the desire itself seems to give way to an overriding jealousy and sado-masochistic power play between the three central characters.

The reader senses Raoule's desire mainly by the destruction it leaves in its wake. To reply to Joan Riviere, it is Raoule's adoption of her desire (= power) which is castrating, not her intellect, although the latter is also intimated by allusions to her writing instruments (Rachilde 37) as well by her comments to the effect that Jacques's body is her poem, her "*œuvre*" (Rachilde 156). Rachilde has come up against the problem of signifying the absolute alterity

of female desire within the constricts of a dominant masculine language. According to Irigaray, female desire is a function of female sexuality which, multiple in nature, cannot be expressed by linear, masculine language. As a solution, Irigaray argues for a separate, feminine language which, being nonlinear, could better express female desire.¹⁶ The solution Rachilde chooses—and it is perhaps her best option, given her historical situation—is to describe the space around this desire. Again one is left with the effects of that desire and with the question of what is behind the mask.

Having no language of her own to express her desire, Raoule is forced to adopt a male persona in order to live as "subject." To reply to Girard, the particular difference between women's dissimulation and men's is that women must dissimulate their desire, not simply to assure themselves of the love of their suitors, but to assure themselves of any kind of subjecthood at all. As presented by Rachilde, women's dissimulation involves not simply denial of all desire, but the donning of a specifically masculine type of desire. Unfortunately for Raoule, this strategy fails: she admits to getting no pleasure from sex. Compared to Marie, Raoule: "se vit donc au niveau de l'ancienne fille de joie... et, comme supériorité, si elle avait celle de la beauté, elle n'avait pas celle du plaisir: *elle en donnait, mais n'en recevait pas*" (Rachilde 122, emphasis added). Is Rachilde implying that without language to record it, female desire cannot adequately be brought to fruition in literature? In any case, Raoule has ultimately succeeded only in turning the male-dominated power structure on its head. And even upside-down, as Irigaray would say, it still remains a male-dominated power structure. Thus the title of this paper, Desiring Venus, is deliberately ambiguous. Is "desiring" to be read as a qualifier for Venus? Or is Venus the object of desire of some hidden subject? Both are partly true (though neither completely is), and in either case, can the reader be absolutely certain to whom "Monsieur Venus" refers?¹⁷

In the end, Rachilde fails to paint a picture of specific female desire. What she does do, to her immense credit, is lay the topic on the table for future discussion, and more importantly, she points to the reasons why such a discussion is so problematic.

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Notes

1. "The following point must be emphasized: the function of the flame which attracts and burns is exercised, in the first half of the century, by the Fatal Man (the Byronic hero), in the second half by the Fatal Woman; the moth destined for sacrifice is in the first case the woman, in the second the man." Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, Trans. Angus Davidson, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1970) 216.

2. Rachilde, *Monsieur Vénus*, 1889, 2nd ed., Pref. Maurice Barrès (Paris: Flammarion, 1977). All references will be made in the text. References to Mr. Barrès's preface to this volume will be indicated by his name followed by the page numbers.

3. Praz discusses women writers but insists that they are unoriginal and glean their plot structures from masculine example, which amounts to saying that their narratives may as well have been written by men, since they follow a masculine structure:

...authoresses also adopted the persecuted woman as a character; but there may be nothing more in this than another of the many manifestations of feminine imitativeness. As the literary tradition has been the monopoly of man, at any rate up till the present, it is natural that women writers should slavishly adopt in their works the masculine point of view (Praz 115).

4. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. 1, 1976, Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990) 3-4.

5. Praz would disagree. He writes: "No analysis of [Monsieur Vénus] could be better than that of Barrès..." (Praz 347).

6. See on this subject Laura Mulvey's analysis of the gendered structure of looking:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.

Mulvey's discussion relates to cinema but is equally applicable to literary narrative.

An active/passive heterosexual division of labour has similarly controlled narrative structure. According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to

gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of advancing the story, making things happen.

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 1973. *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989) 19-20.

7. René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, 1961, 2nd edition (Paris: Grasset/Pluriels, 1978). All references will be made in the text.

8. Luce Irigaray, "Women on the Market," *This Sex Which is not One*, 1977, Trans. Catherine Porter (Ithica: Cornell UP, 1985) 170. All references will be given in the text.

9. Girard discusses one novel written by a woman, *La Princesse de Clèves*, and although "[l]a princesse résume en une phrase toute l'opération du désir métaphysique," Girard does not consider it necessary to mention the name of Mme de Lafayette, and would merely "*rapprocher* [emphasis added] *La Princesse de Clèves* de la grande littérature romanesque..." (Girard 201).

10. "Que le sujet laisse paraître son désir de possession et ce médiateur, aussitôt, copiera ce désir. Il désirera son propre corps; il lui confiera, en d'autres termes, une telle valeur que s'en déposséder lui paraîtra scandaleux" (Girard 185).

11. "Tout désir qui se montre peut susciter ou redoubler le désir d'un rival. Il faut donc dissimuler le désir pour s'emparer de l'objet. C'est cette dissimulation que Stendhal nomme *hypocrisie*. L'hypocrite réprime, dans son désir, tout ce qui peut être vu, c'est-à-dire tout ce qui est élan vers l'objet" (Girard 179).

12. "Dans la médiation double chacun joue sa liberté contre celle d'autrui. La lutte est terminée dès que l'un des combattants confesse son désir et humilie son orgueil" (Girard 130).

13. Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," 1929, *Formations of Fantasy*, Ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (New York: Methuen, 1986). All references will be given in the text.

14. As Stephen Heath points out, Riviere's interest in this question is itself more than intellectual, since she herself is an example of the "intellectual women" she studies. See Stephen Heath, "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade," *Formations of Fantasy*, 45-61. Heath informs us that Riviere's major intellectual enterprise was the translation of a large bulk of Freud. As a point of interest, Riviere was analysed by Ernest Jones, Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein. Heath notes that Riviere was passed back and forth between Jones and Freud as an object of analysis and possibly of desire as well. One is led to conclude that the contradiction in her own double position as intellectual subject (masculine) and as object of exchange/desire (feminine) must certainly have fueled Riviere's intellectual curiosity and infused it with great personal stakes.

15. Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977) 20. Barthes also writes:

"Suis-je amoureux? —Oui, puisque j'attends." L'autre, lui, n'attend jamais. Parfois, je veux jouer à celui qui n'attend pas; j'essaye de m'occuper ailleurs, d'arriver en retard; mais, à ce jeu, je perds toujours: quoi que je fasse, je me retrouve désceuvré, exact, voire en avance. L'identité fatale de l'amoureux n'est rien d'autre que: *je suis celui qui attend* (49-50).

16. See Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One" and "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine," *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 23-33, 68-85.

17. Certain critics assert that "Monsieur Venus" refers to Jacques, while others assign it to Raoule. For Robert Ziegler, "Jacques Silvert is not so much frustrated as he is neutralized, objectified, turned into 'un Vénus' . . ." (Ziegler 116), whereas Melanie Hawthorne states plainly that "Raoule is Monsieur Vénus" (Hawthorne 166). See Robert Ziegler, "Rachilde and 'l'amour compliqué,'" *Atlantis* 11.2(Spring 1986): 115-124. See also Melanie Hawthorne, "Monsieur Vénus: A Critique of Gender Roles," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 16.1-2 (Fall-Winter 1987-88): 162-79.

PUBLICATION ABSTRACT

Eric Gans

Originary Thinking

Stanford University Press, 1993

Originary Thinking is the fourth in a series of works I have devoted to "generative anthropology," which may be defined as the minimalist construction of the human from a hypothetical communal event in which intraspecific violence is deferred by the production of a linguistic sign. The expression "originary thinking," emphasizing process rather than results, also serves to pose this new discipline as a rival to philosophy as the traditional form of "pure thought." *Originary Thinking* pursues in the area of religion, ethics, philosophy of language, theory of discourse, and esthetics the exploration begun in *The Origin of Language* (1981), *The End of Culture* (1985), and *Science and Faith* (1990). It adds two significant new elements:

1. "originary analysis," a methodology for rethinking the fundamental categories of the human as elements of the originary scene, and
2. a "historical esthetics" that reflects the esthetic's privileged status in the historicization of the originary, as exemplified in Western (art-) history from the classical through the postmodern era.

PUBLICATION ABSTRACT

Peter Haidu

The Subject of Violence. The Song of Roland and the Birth of the State
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993

Violences eurogenic and nomadic in origin, fuse in the institution of knighthood, which bequeaths violence to modernity. Medieval civilization, reaching toward the stability of economic productivity, attempts to limit or export the violent destructiveness of knighthood in the Peace/Truce of God movements and the Crusades. It also functionalizes feudal violence within its class structure, by attaching its mounted bearers to the economic structure of

the banal *seigneurie*, organized to benefit the dominant aristocracy. The function of knighthood is to extort surplus value from the peasantry, by enacted or threatened violence. The constitutive aporia of medieval civilization is dependency on a violence which impedes its economic development.

The Song of Roland stages feudal knighthood's self-destruction, in full recognition its heroic claim to honor, and by its own violence. It then stages its substitution by troops created as subordinates of an ultimate power, that of Charlemagne, to whom attaches a repeated theme of culpability. The same issue is staged by the Saracens, a mirror image of the Christian armies, doubling and confirming the problematization of the lord-vassal relation.

Ganelon's trial for treason at the end of the poem specifies the nomothetic issue, establishing a principle of subordination to the monarch which was a political invention in relation to the historical co-text. Feudal vengeance, permissible under the rules in effect at the beginning of the poem, becomes illegitimate under the new rule formulated by Thierry de Chartres. The cruel vengeance upon the traitor, drawn and quartered, typologically anticipates the public torture of Damiens in 1757: the same corporeal sign of subjugation functions to establish the royal prerogative which announces the nation-state, as will re-activate royal power after attempted regicide. It signals the creation of a new subjectivity required by the nascent nation-state.

While *The Song of Roland* ends with the indeterminacy of an open text, it produces specifiable meanings whose encodings are inextricably inmixed with the political and economic evolution of the period. It performs an essential moment of this evolution, and it does so as a performative. Proud warrior violence is subjected to the demand of the nascent state, producing a split subjectivity constitutive of modern subjectivity as well. The complex negotiations of the text are decoded by historicized narrative models, as dealing with the issue of fundamental human violence, still instinct in the modern nation-state, in its violences and disintegrations.

PUBLICATION ABSTRACT

Stephen Werner

Blueprint: A Study of Diderot and the Encyclopédie Plates

Birmingham: Summa, 1993

The 2,569 engraved plates of the *Encyclopédie* are as central to its meaning as the articles or cross-references themselves. Most plates depict work scenes or tools and dramatize key Baconian ideas about the dignity of the mechanical arts. Plates change the discourse of "encyclopedisme" through a novel collaborative effort of written texts and pictures. With vignettes of Paris as their backdrop, they endorse an aesthetic of urban *merveilleux*. Ultimately, they rewrite the encyclopedia genre. The *Encyclopédie* is far more than a traditional "illustrated" reference work: it is a modern pictorial encyclopedia. Its visionary or "blueprint" qualities are unique and were conceived by Diderot, the chief sponsor and architect of the plates. Illustrated with reproductions of the original plates.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Study in Avant-Garde Experimentation

The Poetic Theory and Praxis of the Futurist, Cubo-Futurist, Dada,
and Surrealist Groups

Guy Bennet

Doctor of Philosophy in French

University of California, Los Angeles, 1993

Professor Shuhshi Kao, Chair

The poetry of the historical avant-garde is characterized by a penchant for experimentation that transformed virtually all aspects of the poetic text. This brash experimentalism performed a double function, on the one hand representing a sharp and totalizing break with the literary conventions of the past, and, on the other, serving to create a new, distinctly "modern" poetic language. The theoretical foundations of modernist poetics can be found in the futurist, cubo-futurist, dadaist and surrealist manifestoes. These seminal texts are the point of departure of the present study.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part consists of a thorough examination of the respective poetic programs of the aforementioned groups, based on close, textual analyses of key manifestoes and poems. The first chapter focuses on the diverse features of Marinetti's "words-in-freedom," while the second chapter establishes the principles of cubo-futurist poetics, among them, the concepts of the "self-valuable word" and "transrational language." The third chapter is devoted to a discussion of the poetic practice of dadaists Tzara, Ball, Schwitters, et al., and, in the fourth chapter, the central thrust of surrealist poetics is examined in the poetry of Breton.

The second part is a synthetic study of two important tendencies operative in the poetry of the historical avant-garde: the breakdown of conventional language, and the creation of a new, abstract poetic language. The fifth chapter comprises a presentation of the various ways in which grammatical structures and traditional literary techniques are subverted in the poetry of Tzara, Krucenych, Péret and others. In the sixth chapter, the discussion turns to the exploration of alternative linguistic and alinguistic systems as sources of a "non-objective" poetry. Included is an analysis of the abstract phoneticism of the dada poets, the

transrational language of the cubo-futurists, and the non-verbal poetry of the futurists.

By examining each program individually, and then comparing and contrasting their most salient features, one of the driving forces of the art of the historical avant-garde is revealed, namely, the systematic elaboration of a new, formal language.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Poetics of Dance: Narrative Designs from Staël to Maupassant

Sarah Penelope Davies Cordova

Doctor of Philosophy in French

University of California, Los Angeles, 1993

Professor Susan Leigh Foster, Co-chair

Professor Hassan El Nouty, Co-chair

Social dancing plays an essential role in the narratives and poetics of nineteenth-century French authors. An interdisciplinary methodology combining dance and socio-cultural history with textual analysis produces a careful study of context, emplotment and discourse. A chronological approach de-emphasizes canonic concerns and situates dance and literature within their socio-cultural and historical context. Moments in the history of social dance are intercalated with analyses of the novels, novellas and contes by Staël, Krüdener, Balzac, Musset, Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers, Sue and Maupassant.

Within the diegesis of social dancing scenes, embodied characters delineate their social and personal aspirations. Dance foregrounds the relationships among bodies, the subjectivities of different persons, and between any individual body and the individual's subjectivity. In the literature, not only are the dancers predominantly female, but the dancing is gendered as feminine and the balls are written about from the perspective of a male observer.

The establishment of dance as autonomous text allows for an examination of the narratives to test the verisimilitude of the social diegesis and to expose the texts' narrative strategies. Dancing is emplotted at key narrative moments. Initially the dancing is associated with the expression of love or an experience of subjectivity.

With the popularity of the chahut, whose lexicon and syntax parodied ballet and its narratives, spectacularisation transforms the female body into a commodified entity that circulates through a sexual economy. Gradually, the plot resists the incorporation of the description or explanation of the dancing. As the narrator's fascination with the dancing recognizes its potency as mode of semiosis, the actual dancing at the ball scene is elided. Although dancing increasingly conflicts with the plot's unfolding, close readings show dancing to be a privileged trope for the writers' poetics. Mapping the dances' choreography reveals aspects of the narratives' designs, and traces literature's incorporation of its Other—dance.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Power and Secret Societies in Selected Novels of *La Comédie Humaine*

Jayashree Srinivasan Madapusi

Doctor of Philosophy in French

University of California, Los Angeles, 1993

Professor Andrea Loselle, Co-Chair

Professor Eric L. Gans, Co-Chair

Histoire impartiale des Jesuites, published by Balzac in 1824, serves as the starting point for Balzac's concept of what constitutes a secret society and serves as the base for his later work done on secret societies in *La Comédie humaine*. What Balzac saw in the *Compagnie de Jésus* was not just an association, but an entire power structure.

In this study the secret societies of the *Comédie* have been divided into two broad classifications: "violent" and "non-violent," which have been further subdivided into "revolutionary," "Epicurean," "detective," and "reformatory" secret societies.

The principal objective of this study is to examine the influence exercised by the secret associations of the *Comédie* on the society in which they existed, and which in turn influenced them. This study combines two concepts. It coordinates George Simmel's theoretical analysis of secret societies with Michel Foucault's idea of power as the means by which relations of forces are deployed. Through application of the concepts of this sociologist and this philosopher

to the secret societies of the *Comédie*, this study goes on to show how power is held by an elite group and how the retention of this power depends not only on the network of relations between the members of a secret group, but also on the relations between this group and the larger society of which these secret associations are a part.

In any environment one group is bound to be affected and influenced by the other groups, leading to mutual transformations which may be "positive" or "negative." This study points out how the secret societies of the *Comédie* illuminate defects of the larger society in which they exist, and how they demonstrate ways of correcting these defects and of bringing about personal and social transformations within themselves, as well as within the external society. Initially foci of opposition to external society, these secret societies eventually end up coordinating their activities with those of society, bringing about social transformations.

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